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PLUCK AND LUCK

MISSING FROM SCHOOL
OR THE MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE
OF BILLY BIRD
AND OTHER STORIES

By Howard Austin



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PLUCK AND LUCK

Stories of Adventure

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Missing From School

OR,

The Mysterious Disappearance of Billy Bird

By HOWARD AUSTIN

CHAPTER I.

HOW THE CANOE WENT OVER THE FALLS.

"Look out for Billy! Hey, boys, look out for Billy Bird!"

Raymond Whitcomb gave a shout which was heard all over Spy Pond and threw the boys of Dr. Whiteside's Academy into a state of excitement at once.

"He'll upset!" shouted one.

"He'll go over the falls, sure pop!" cried another.

"Head him off, boys! Head him off!" a dozen yelled, but Joe Quigley, the school bully, who always rejoiced in other people's misfortunes and made a joke of them, sat back in his canoe and laughed.

Raymond Whitcomb, commonly called Ray by his schoolfellows, was too far in the rear to help the boy, who, by bad management of his canoe, had got himself into trouble and was now being blown perilously near the falls, where the water of Spy Pond went tumbling over the only bed of rocks anywhere to be found in the vicinity of Lyndon, Michigan, forming the Fox River, a stream not more than a mile in length, which in time of freshet went rushing into Lake Michigan with an energy which ought to have entitled it to a longer existence and was there lost.

But his cry of warning had been heard and this saved the boy from an accident which might have been serious.

The boys who were nearest to him changed their course and ran their canoes in front of Billy's, which brought him to a temporary standstill and enabled him to again get control of his sail.

It was practice day for the Canoe Club of Dr. Whiteside's Academy.

A canoe regatta was in the wind and a few weeks later it was proposed to sail a race with a Chicago club, which had challenged the school.

The race was to take place on the lake, but as this was too distant from the academy to make it possible to practice there—and often too dangerous—Spy Pond had been chosen, being at the foot of the little rise upon which the academy stood.

"You better give it up, Bill!" shouted Joe Quigley, sarcas-

tically, when the canoes swung around and stood back up the pond. "You can't do anything with your old tub and there's no use trying. Better go back to school and help the girls play croquet."

Billy Bird made no answer. He was rather a sensitive boy and, though full of ambition to join his schoolfellows in all their sports, his lack of physical strength, combined with a certain "backhandedness," as Ray always called it, made it very hard for him to hold up his end.

"Shut up, Joe! You're always picking at Billy," called Ray, from his canoe, where he was making some changes in his sail, which was the reason he had not joined in the run.

"That's what he is!" cried Fred Fielding. "There isn't a clumsier hand at canoe sailing than Joe himself."

The bumptious Master Quigley was "on his ear" in an instant.

Fact was, Joe was always "rowing," forever kicking up a muss.

Because his father was a rich contractor and a prominent ward politician in Chicago, Joe labored under the delusion that he could "boss" the whole school.

It was true that he did succeed in bullying the younger boys, but when it came to Ray and Fred and the older ones they simply would not stand it, which fact Ray had taken occasion to impress upon the bully's rather limited understanding more than once.

"Bet you I can sail close to the falls and not go over!" cried Joe, boasting. "I done it twict last week when I was practicing here alone."

"You had better go and practice grammar," sneered Fred. "Done it twict. Ha! ha! ha!"

"Shut up there, Fielding, or I'll break your head!" cried Quigley, but Ray put a stop to the quarrel by calling "time."

This meant to get in line for another race.

The goal was a certain big tree about a hundred feet from the falls.

The object of this exercise was to determine which were actually the best canoes in the fleet, as the selection at the coming race was to be limited to four.

Incidentally, also, was to be demonstrated which of the boys were the most expert.

All hands were ambitious to figure in the race, but as only four could have that honor the competition was naturally keen.

It was a beautiful afternoon in the latter part of April, perhaps a little too windy, but otherwise a perfect day for this sort of work.

Over on the shore near the tree the girls of Professor Whiteside's Academy were gathered, watching the movements of the canoes.

Carrie James was there, so was Olive Moore and Mamie Sheldon and a dozen more or less popular with the boys, who, under the circumstances, naturally wanted to make the best display of their skill possible.

And while they are getting in line let us pause to say a word about Dr. Whiteside's famous academy for boys and girls, which was and still is one of the most thorough, as well as popular, educational institutions in the neighborhood of Chicago.

Situated just around the bend of the lake, near the Michigan shore, its location made it doubly attractive on account of its nearness to the metropolis of the West.

Hence the school was well patronized and at the time of which we write there were over seventy-five boys in attendance and fully fifty girls.

Besides the canoe club there were many other clubs in connection with the school, but as our story principally concerns the boys who were gathered on Spy Pond that April day, we will return to them at once.

"Ready! Let her go!" shouted Ray, and this time the start was made in good shape.

Ray and Fred kept pretty close together and had the lead from the start.

Joe Quigley was third at first and then dropped back to the fifth place.

Poor Billy Bird, who felt himself thoroughly called down by what had occurred, made the start with the rest, but immediately pulled out and sailed his canoe to the float, at the foot of the school grounds.

"There they go! They are off!" cried the girls from the shore.

"Oh, look at Ray! Isn't he just splendid!" exclaimed Carrie James. "Doesn't he handle his canoe well?"

"Not half as well as Fred," replied Olive Moore. "Fred is the handsomest fellow in the school."

Although these remarks did not reach the ears of the young canoeists, they all know that the eyes of the girls were upon them and naturally let themselves out to do their best.

Ray passed the tree half a length in advance of Fred, who certainly made a good second. The other came trailing after them, Joe Quigley coming up sixth.

The girls screamed with excitement, as girls will, and applauded Ray and Fred.

The move now was to make a circuit and beat back against the wind.

Ray started to do so, when all at once Joe Quigley, instead of keeping his place, shot right across the course toward the falls.

"Get back out of that, Joe! Are you crazy?" shouted Ray, who had all he could do to prevent a collision.

"Indeed I won't!" cried Joe. "I'll show you fellers how near I can run to the falls. I'm out of the race anyhow and I'll go where I please."

"You'll go to pot if you keep on that way and take your canoe with you!" cried Fred.

Now, this had a double meaning.

To "go to pot" is a favorite saying among boys, of course, but below the falls was a hole filled with jagged rocks, where the water was always foaming and boiling, as it tried to force its way into Fox River.

This was called the "Pot" by the boys, and while a canoe might shoot the falls in safety—they were only twelve feet high—it could never hope to survive the Pot and to avoid being dashed to pieces on the rocks.

Ray knew the danger and he knew only too well that Joe was but a clumsy hand at canoeing.

"He'll go over as sure as fate!" he shouted. "Some one must look after him or he'll be drowned."

He swung around and drove his canoe over to the shore, where the girls stood; the work of a moment only.

"Oh, look at him! Joe will go over the falls!" screamed Mamie Sheldon, and a dozen other girls added their cries to hers, but instead of acting as a warning to the stupid braggart in the canoe, they only served to make him more determined to try his risky experiment and make the turn at the very edge of the falls.

As for Ray, he never doubted from the first what the result would be.

"He's in for it, girls," he cried, and ran along the bank to the edge of the falls.

He had scarcely reached it when Joe started to make his turn.

Instantly the wind swept the canoe broadside on toward the falls and Joe ran up his true colors at last.

"Oh, save me! save me!" he yelled, and then, like the fool that he was, stood up in the canoe.

"Sit down!" cried Fred. "Sit down, you idiot! Sit down!"

The girls on the shore screamed. Carrie James covered her face with her hands, calling out: "Oh, don't, Ray! Don't go!"

Ray had thrown off his hat and coat and kicked the shoes from his feet.

"Hold on, Quigley! Don't let go of the canoe!" he shouted.

The end had come. The canoe toppled over the falls and was swept out of sight.

Quick as a flash Ray threw out his arms and took a header down into the Pot.

CHAPTER II.

THE GIANT WHO STOOD ON THE WHARF.

Now, Ray Whitcomb had done a much braver thing than one might naturally suppose.

Of course, any good swimmer can jump in and save life if he knows how to handle himself, and Ray was as good a swimmer as there was in the school.

Trouble was, if you once got into the Pot it was no easy job to get out of it again, and if you did get out too suddenly you were liable to be swept among the rocks into Fox River and there the danger came.

Most of the year Fox River was a mere creek, which anybody could jump across without the least risk of getting wet feet, but in April, after the break up of the ice it became a deep, swift stream, which ran its short course between two of those immense sand hills which are of frequent occurrence on the Michigan shore of the lake.

These hills were forty feet high and no man living could possibly climb them, as the shifting sand of which they were composed offered no foothold.

Thus if one was unfortunate enough to get into Fox River the only thing to do was to swim on until you came to its end and take big chances of being able to land on the lake shore.

Ray knew all this when he boldly jumped to the rescue of Joe Quigley.

Joe knew it, too, and his yell of despair as he went over the falls might have been heard half a mile away.

The passage of the falls was made successfully enough, so far as Joe was concerned, but the canoe was broken to splinters.

When Ray came up to the surface of the Pot there was Joe clinging to one of the sharp rocks, yelling for help like a good fellow, while Carrie James, Olive Moore and the other girls had run down the bank to the edge of the Pot and were screaming, too.

"Hold on, Quigley! Don't make such a row!" cried Ray, balancing himself in the water. "I'll get you all right enough!"

"Help! help! Save me! I can't swim but a little. I'll be swept into Fox River! I can't hold on here!" Joe yelled, full of words, as usual, but with few ideas.

Ray swam to his side and flung his arm about him, just as he slipped his hold on the rock.

"Stop that yelling! Be a man and I'll save you!" he shouted. "No, don't try to grab me; if you do I'll let you go! Ah, you will, will you? Take that, you fool!"

Ray just had to haul off and hit him or Joe would have dragged them both down.

For this Joe never forgave him, though it brought the foolish fellow to his senses at the time.

Meanwhile, the boys were running their canoes ashore with the intention of coming down the bank to see what was going on below the falls.

As they came down the hill they saw Ray treading water in the Pot, holding Joe by the legs, while Carrie James was bending down over the water trying to seize the hands of the frightened boy.

"Catch him, Carrie!" cried Ray. "I'll hold him up! Be careful now, Joe, that you don't pull Carrie in, and on your life don't you kick me."

It was the biggest risk Ray had taken yet, for Joe was a chump if ever there was one.

The instant he got hold of Carrie's hand, instead of waiting a second for Ray to push him forward, he kicked back violently and the young life-saver got it in the head.

"Oh! oh! oh!" screamed the girls, in chorus.

"Save Ray!" shouted Fred Fielding.

"You idiot! I wish I had let you drown!" cried Carrie, as she dragged Joe upon the shore.

But it was entirely too late to do anything for Ray now. Everything depended upon himself.

With a sharp cry of pain the brave boy slipped back into the Pot and disappeared under the water.

When the boys and girls next saw him an instant later he was lying on his back in the river, being whirled toward the sand hills.

Like a flash he passed between them and disappeared.

If Ray Whitcomb had been one of the nervous, scary sort he would have seen his finish in short order, but, as a matter of fact, he was nothing of the kind.

Joe's heel had bruised his forehead, but had not seriously hurt him. His danger was now in drowning himself by his own struggles or in being swept out into the lake.

Ray realized all this fully.

He and the other boys of Dr. Whiteside's Academy had shot down Fox River in their canoes many a time.

"If I can keep my head above water I'm in no real danger," thought Ray. "Only thing is to keep from getting swamped in the rush."

The best way to accomplish this was to lie on his back, that was certain, and Ray got into that position as quick as possible.

He tried to go down feet first, but found it impossible to keep himself in position, for the force of the current would

swing him around, so he just let himself go and went flying headfirst down the stream.

"I must look alive for the lake," he thought. "I don't want to be swept out. I ought to be able to get ashore at the old foundry. It will only be a moment now."

And while the river is carrying Ray along at fearful speed let us pause for a moment more and explain about that same "old foundry," on account of the bearing it has upon what happened later on.

Many years before the mouth of Fox River was a scene of activity.

A locomotive works had been established there, a large iron foundry was built, and a machine shop and wharf, besides a large house for the superintendent and a number of small ones for the operatives in the works.

For a long time business flourished there, but at last the concern failed and for some reason the expensive plant was never again operated.

The longer it lay idle the worse it grew. The machinery rusted, became antiquated and behind the times, the buildings began falling into a ruinous condition, until at last everything worth removing was taken away by a Chicago junk dealer and the plant entirely abandoned.

"The deserted village," Dr. Whiteside's pupils called it, and it certainly could not have had a better name.

Right alongside these ruined buildings Fox River emptied into the lake and it was at the old wharf on the riverside that Ray meant to make his landing, and did.

He was all prepared for business when he shot out from between the sand hills.

Turning over on his stomach, he struck out for the wharf and managed to catch hold of one of the piles which held it up, where he clung on desperately, for the current was running like a mill-race and his strength was almost gone.

But he was not saved yet by any means. To climb upon the wharf was impossible, for the piles were fearfully slippery.

On either side there was a wall of planks, which supported the bank. This wall was six feet high and as slippery as glass. Ray could no more climb it than he could fly.

"Oh, if I only had some one to throw me a rope!" he thought. "I can't climb up and I can hold on but a moment. I had better let myself go and take my chances in the lake."

He was just about to give up when suddenly the last thing that Ray expected to happen there in the deserted village occurred.

A man suddenly looked down upon him from the wharf.

"Hello, boy! What in thunder are you doing there?" he exclaimed, and Ray also gave an exclamation of astonishment, for never in his life, outside of a dime museum, had he seen anything like this before.

The man who stood looking down at him was seven feet tall at the very least.

CHAPTER III.

THE STRANGE CONDUCT OF BILLY BIRD.

"Boy, do you want to get up out of that?" asked the giant, twisting his face up into the most horrible knots, a cross between a scowl and a smile.

"Well, naturally," replied Ray. "I don't want to stay here. Can't you raise a rope or something and give me a lift?"

"I can do it without a rope," replied the giant. "I'll give you a hand."

Probably there was not another man in the State of Michi-

gan who could have done it, but the giant on the wharf could, and did.

He lay down and, bracing his feet, bent over so far that Ray fully expected to see him topple over and come tumbling down on top of him.

But the giant knew his business better.

He put out his long, right arm and called to Ray to take hold.

Strength hardly expressed the power he exerted then, for he just drew Ray right up out of the water without any apparent exertion, until the boy was able to get hold of the stringpiece with the other hand; then one quick jerk and Ray stood all dripping facing the giant on the wharf.

He was certainly a queer-looking customer, being not only very tall, but very thin and very old, Ray thought, for his face was terribly wrinkled and his hair quite gray.

His clothes were black and dreadfully shabby, his shoes were all broken and out at the toes; to make his appearance more absurd, he wore on his head a battered old plug hat which made him look a foot taller than he really was.

"Ha! Well, boy, you are out of that scrape all right," he said, in a high-pitched, rasping voice. "You are all wet, but it might have been worse. What's your name?"

"My name is Ray Whitcomb," replied our hero, "and I'm sure I am very much obliged to you, sir. I might have saved myself in the lake, but I couldn't have held on there a minute more."

"Probably not," replied the giant. "How did you get there, boy?"

Ray told his story, the giant screwing his face up into a hundred knots while he was talking.

"Don't do a thing like that again," he snapped. "No sense in sacrificing your own life to save that of a fool. So you are one of Dr. Whiteside's pupils, are you? Do you know a boy they call Billy Bird?"

"Very well, sir. Billy is one of my particular friends."

The giant screwed his face up again. His upper set of false teeth dropped down into his mouth at the same time and he forced them back into place with a gobbling noise which was very unpleasant, for Ray thought he was going to swallow them.

"One of your particular friends, eh?" he repeated. "Just so. Boys make friends easily. Old fellows like me know better. Ray Whitcomb, I have done you a service. Will you do one for me?"

"Certainly, sir," replied Ray, putting his hand into his pocket, for he fancied he knew what was coming.

"No, no, not that! Put up your money!" interposed the giant. "I am no tramp, although I may look like one to you. I want you to take this letter and deliver it to Billy Bird."

As he spoke the giant drew a sealed envelope from his pocket, where, judging from its greasy, crumpled appearance, Ray fancied it must have remained a long while, and placed it in the boy's hand.

"Do that for me and you will oblige me," he said. "You will also save me the necessity of delivering it myself, which, for various reasons, I don't want to do."

"I'll do it, sir," replied Ray, wonderingly, for he could not imagine what this strange character could possibly have to do with Billy Bird. "Who shall I say gave it to me?" he asked.

"You don't have to say," replied the giant. "The letter tells that. Good day, young man. Hope you don't get cold."

He turned and walked rapidly away, taking fearful strides.

Ray, watching, saw him disappear around the corner of the old foundry a moment later and then he hurried after him, feeling that he really ought to know more about the man.

It was too late, however.

When Ray turned the corner of the old foundry the giant was nowhere to be seen.

Being in his stocking feet and dripping wet, Ray was certainly in poor shape to start off giant hunting, and he came to the very sensible conclusion that as a mile lay between him and the academy the best thing he could do was to cover it as quickly as possible, and with the letter in his hand he started off on the run.

The path was a lonely one—there was no regular road leading his way—and Ray had not more than half covered the distance when he heard loud shouts ahead of him and saw a great crowd of the "Whitesides," as the academy boys called themselves, running down the path, with Fred Fielding in the lead.

It was a joyful meeting; there was a lot said on both sides, but we pass it over as lightly as Ray did the compliments of his friends.

"Pshaw! It was nothing, boys; just nothing at all," he declared. "I had a queer adventure at the end, though, which I must tell you about. Where's Billy Bird? I've got a letter for him."

Then came the story of the giant and the greatest curiosity was aroused.

But it was not to be satisfied then, for Billy was not among the rest, nor was Joe Quigley, who had gone straight back to school for dry clothes.

"And will you believe it, Ray," said Fred, who made this announcement, "Joe had the gall to say that you crowded him over the dam? Never a word about your saving his life, either. He said, though, if you hadn't punched him there in the Pot he could have got out by himself."

It was just like Joe.

Of course, Ray had a good deal to say about it all, as he hurried back to the academy, a little more comfortable now, for Fred had brought his hat, coat and shoes along.

It was nearly dark when the boys reached the academy and, as the supper-bell was about to ring, Ray had just time to change his clothes.

The talk the last part of the way had all run to canoes, as usual, and Ray forgot the giant and the letter, too, for, as it happened, he saw nothing of Billy Bird until the retiring bell rang and he met him in dormitory No. 10, which he shared with Billy and Fred.

"Oh, Ray, I never knew a thing about your accident until just a little while ago!" exclaimed Billy. "You see, I went up in the woods alone and after supper I went right to studying. I'm glad you came out of it all right."

"Thank you, Billy. There never was any danger, though," replied Ray. "I've got something to tell you, old man, but first let me give you this." Ray went to his coat, which he had hung up for the night, and took out the letter.

"For me, Ray?" demanded Billy, seeing his name written across it. "Where in the world did you get this?"

"Got it from a giant down at the deserted village," laughed Ray.

"What!"

"Oh, read it and find out. I'll tell you all about it then. Say, Fred, I think I'll have to lighten up my canoe. She carries too much weight altogether and—hello! What's the matter here?"

Billy Bird had uttered a sharp cry.

"Oh, Ray! Oh, Ray!" he called out, clutching the letter in his hand.

"What is it? What in the world is the matter with you, Billy?" cried Ray, turning to the boy, who seemed to be suffering from some terrible shock.

"Oh, don't ask me! I can't tell you. I must go! I must go!"

Ray threw his arm around him and tried to take the letter,

but Billy pulled away and thrust it into his pocket, saying, "No, no! No, no!"

"Tell me what's the matter?" demanded Ray.

"No, no! I can't! I can't! I must go!"

"Go where?"

"No matter! No matter! I can't explain."

"But you can't get out to-night; the gates are locked. Unless you want to rout up Dr. Whiteside you can't get out of the school."

"Yes, I know! I must wait till morning. Then it will be too late. See, I am quiet now. Who gave you that letter, Ray?"

Ray hastily told about the giant.

Billy walked to the window while he was talking and stood looking out.

Suddenly he gave a sharp cry and caught Ray by the arm.

"Look! Look!" he exclaimed. "Is that the man?"

Fred rushed to the window as Ray hastily threw up the sash.

There was a little hill back of the school, the top of which rose above the wall, and there, standing upon it in the full moonlight, was a man seven feet tall at the least.

It was the giant of the deserted village, as Ray saw at a glance.

"That's the man!" he cried.

"Then I'm lost!" gasped Billy, and he threw himself on the bed, face downward, and sobbed as though his heart would break.

The instant the boys showed themselves at the open window the giant ran down the hill and disappeared.

For an hour or more Ray and Fred worked over Billy, but they could draw nothing out of him.

At last he fell asleep, with the letter still clutched in his hand.

Fred was for taking it away and reading it, but Ray refused to resort to any such method to solve the mystery, so the boys left Billy as he was and tumbled into bed.

A little after midnight Ray woke up.

"Billy!" he called. "Hey, Billy!"

There was no answer.

Ray got up and struck a match.

To his amazement the adjoining bed was vacant.

Billy Bird had disappeared and upon the bed lay a scrap of paper with these words hastily scrawled:

"RAY:—If I am not in to breakfast you will never see me alive again. Look for my body in Lake Michigan; it is all you can do. Always your friend, BILLY BIRD."

CHAPTER IV.

THOSE GHOSTLY LIGHTS.

If there were ever two thoroughly astonished boys in Dr. Whiteside's Academy it was Ray Whitcomb and Fred Fielding that night in dormitory No. 10.

Billy Bird had strangely disappeared and, what was more, to judge from the letter which he had left behind him, he had no intention of coming back again.

That was the time Ray deeply regretted that he had not taken Fred's advice and read the giant's mysterious missive when he had the chance.

For a moment the two boys stood looking at each other in blank amazement.

"Let me see the note," said Fred. "It can't be that you have read it straight."

"Oh, but I have," said Ray. "Look at it for yourself if you don't believe me."

"That's surely what it says," mused Fred, looking over the paper. "How in the world do you suppose he got away?"

"There's the window."

"Yes, but he couldn't have jumped out. It's forty feet down to the ground."

"You don't seem to realize that the clothes have been stripped off that spare bed. Of course, he tied them together and dropped down as easy as rolling off a log—look here, I told you I was right."

The window stood wide open when Ray first got out of bed, but in the excitement of the moment he had not looked out until now.

The condition of things outside the window told the story.

There was the rope of bedclothes hanging to a big hook which had been screwed into the weather-boarding.

This improvised rope reached almost to the ground and as the blankets, sheets and coverlet had been firmly knotted together the boys saw that Billy had experienced no difficulty in reaching the school yard, but there was the fence to be scaled after that.

"That's the hook that was swiped out of the boat-house!" exclaimed Fred.

"That's what it is," replied Ray, examining it. "Not a doubt about it. Billy must have had it in his pocket all the time."

"Looks so. He must have had this very thing in mind."

"I agree with you. Billy has been in a bad state of mind this long while; nervous as a cat, afraid of his own shadow. Remember how he used to watch when the mail-bag came in. He's been expecting that letter, you may be sure. Oh, what a fool I was to take it from that man."

"Don't say that, Ray. How could you know? Billy was a strange fellow, anyhow. Don't you know that we never could find out who his folks were or just where he came from? I always supposed that Dr. Whiteside knew, but now I'd like to bet high that he doesn't know any more about it than we do ourselves. Let's get downstairs and rout him up and tell him what has happened. What do you say?"

"I say no," replied Ray, decidedly. "If Billy had wanted to take Dr. Whiteside into his confidence he would have done it. Don't let's kick up a row before morning, but I'll tell you what I will do with you, Fred."

"What?"

"Follow him."

"I'm with you."

"We may be able to trace him. If we can, why, then there's a chance of coming up with him always. We've got five hours good ahead of us before daylight and a lot can be done in that time."

No proposition could have pleased Fred Fielding better, for he was as full of the love of adventure as most boys of his age.

Following Ray's example, he hurriedly dressed and in a few moments the two boys were ready to act.

Ray let himself down by the rope of bedclothes hand over hand; Fred lost his grip and slid down, but reached the yard all right.

"Keep as quiet as possible," whispered Ray. "There will be trouble if we are caught at this game."

They stood still, listening.

The windows of the big building were all dark and not a sound broke the midnight silence.

"How are we going to get over the fence?" whispered Fred.

"If Billy got over I guess we can, all right; come down by the barn, like enough he found a ladder there."

Ray had hit it right.

There, leaning against the fence alongside the barn, was an old stepladder.

It was considerably broken and had been thrown out on the wood-pile to be converted into kindling, but it had evidently served Billy's purpose all right and it did the same for Ray and Fred.

Ray went up first and, throwing himself over the fence, hung on and dropped to the ground below, Fred immediately following his example.

"How in the world are we ever going to get back again?" he questioned, as he stood beside Ray, who was looking at the ground between the fence and the rise of the hill.

"We'll leave that to take care of itself, Fred; see, here's where Billy Jumped down—see the mark of his feet?"

"I do. Which way do you suppose he went?"

"If the ground were only a little softer we could easily tell, but I take it to be up the hill, anyhow."

"Why?"

"Because that's the shortest way over to the path which leads down to the deserted village."

"You think he has gone there?"

"Well, it's the only thing I can think. Of course, I may be all wrong, though."

"We'll try that way first," said Fred, and they hurried up the hill, passed down on the other side and struck the path.

Here it was soft sand and Ray had a hope that he might strike something like a trail.

He was not disappointed.

Stooping down he struck a match and carefully searched for footprints, finding them in a moment.

They were four in number, two very large ones and two medium-sized ones. They led off in the direction of the deserted village, just as Ray had expected them to do.

"There you are, Fred!" he exclaimed. "Billy and the giant—you see."

"The path is sandy in a dozen places," said Fred. "We ought to be able to trace them so."

"We can only try it," replied Ray. "They can't be long gone. We may catch up with them. Run, Fred! Run for your life! That long-legged snoozer is too old to get over the ground very fast."

Now, Ray was a famous sprinter and Fred was but little his inferior.

They covered the ground in lively style, sticking as closely to the path as they could, which they found but little difficulty in doing, since it was bright moonlight.

Little had Ray imagined when he came up from the deserted village that afternoon that he was to find himself flying back over the same ground again before morning in such a fashion as this.

They came to the top of the hill which looked down on the deserted village in surprisingly short time, but without seeing anything of Billy Bird and the tall man, although at several points Ray saw the footprints, which always pointed in the same direction—the direction in which they were going.

At the top of the hill Ray came to a halt, thoroughly winded by his exertions.

"No sign of them yet," panted Fred, "but they certainly went this way."

"You noticed the footprints, then?"

"Oh, yes, they were plain enough. Ray, what can it all mean?"

"Don't ask me. I'm sure I can't tell. We must get down there and see, though."

"Hold on," whispered Fred. "Great Scott! There's a light

moving in one of those buildings now. Upstairs in that long shop just beyond the foundry—don't you see?"

"Why, of course, I see. We've treed our game all right, I guess. Come on!"

"Wait a minute. Let's watch the light and see where it goes."

"Come on! Come on!"

"No, wait! Say, it's moving downstairs—don't you see it passing the windows? There, now, it is gone altogether. Say, Ray, it can't be a watchman? There's no one taking charge of the old buildings now."

"No, no! Hasn't been in my time."

"I know, but some concern may have bought the plant and be getting ready to start up again."

"You can figure it that way if you want to, Fred, but I tell you it isn't so. Your light has vanished. Now, will you come on?"

To have held back now would have been to write himself down a coward, so Fred ran on down the hill after Ray, who had already started.

They had covered about half the distance when suddenly a strange thing occurred which was so startling that it brought the boys up with a round turn.

All at once every window of the upper story of the old machine shop was ablaze with light and both boys distinctly saw dark figures moving about the large room.

"Ghosts, by gravy!" gasped Fred. "The stories they tell about the deserted village are true after all."

Though we had neglected to mention it, yet it is a fact that for several years these old deserted buildings on the lakeside had borne a most evil reputation.

People said that they were haunted and that oftentimes about the midnight hour strange lights were seen flitting from room to room.

"Nonsense! It can't be so!" cried Ray, "but as true as you live there is some one in there, Fred."

"Some one! Why, there's twenty men at least. Look, Ray, look! Don't you see them behind the windows there?"

"Indeed I do! Come on. I'm bound to know what all this means."

But Fred was good and scared and he held back, while Ray started boldly down the hill.

CHAPTER V.

THE MYSTERY DEEPENS.

Of course Fred could not stay behind after this.

So he ran on down the hill after Ray, coming up with him just as he reached the foundry yard.

By this time the situation had completely altered.

The lights in the windows of the upper story of the old machine shop had now entirely disappeared and the deserted village had relapsed into its usual gloomy condition.

All was dark and "pokerish" and to think of making a closer investigation was anything but pleasant.

Ray paused beside the old foundry and waited for Fred to come up.

"Say, one of us has got to tackle that machine shop," he whispered, "and I'm going to be the one. You'll stand by me, Fred, in case trouble comes?"

"Why, of course."

"No holding back now. You'll do just what I do."

"You bet. Count on me, old man."

"Then come on," said Ray, boldly. "We might as well take the bull by the horns as to muss around its tail. I'm going straight upstairs into that room, ghosts or no ghosts, for I am satisfied that it's the only way we will ever solve the mystery about Billy Bird."

Fred's teeth were chattering. He thought then that Ray Whitcomb was just about as brave as "they make 'em," and he was not very far from the truth.

Ray walked boldly up to the steep flight of steps, which, on the outside of the big frame building, led up to the second story. This was a common way of building in factory architecture in old days out West.

There wasn't a sign of light in the windows now, nor a sound to be heard except the dashing of the water of Lake Michigan against the bulkhead.

Ray ran up the steps and knocked on the door with as much assurance as if it had been broad daylight, but his heart was in his mouth and he was secretly glad when Fred caught hold of his coat-tail, for there was no denying that he was badly scared.

There was no answer at first, so Ray knocked again and again.

Presently both the boys were startled by hearing the sound of heavy footsteps behind the door.

"Some one is coming!" gasped Fred.

"Hush! Keep cool!" whispered Ray. "Whoever it is he don't seem to be in a hurry to open up. Ah! Look there!"

Ray pointed to the window, which opened on the platform at the top of the steps right alongside the door.

There was a man's face at the window. A hideously ugly face, all twisted up into knots.

It was the giant, fast enough. He held up a lantern close to the pane and stared out at the boys.

"Great Scott! What a face!" gasped Fred. "Let's slope, Ray."

"You bet I won't," answered Ray. "I only wish I had a revolver—that's all. Hush! He is going to open the door."

It was certainly very startling.

The door of the upper story of the old machine shop had not been built to accommodate the giant, but there he was behind it when it flew back.

In order to get a good look at the boys he was obliged to thrust his head and shoulders out of the door, while his body and long limbs remained inside.

In this queer position, with his face close to Ray's, he held up the lantern, throwing the light full in the faces of the two astonished boys.

"Well! What is it?" he demanded. "What do you want here at this time of night?"

Ray, by a great effort of mind, managed to keep his wits about him.

"How are you, sir?" he said. "Is Billy Bird in here?"

The giant let the teeth drop down from his upper jaw and gobbled them up again, at the same time twisting his face into a hundred knots.

"Is Billy Bird in here?" he drawled, sarcastically. "What a question to ask a respectable American citizen at this hour of the night. Young men, go away—go right away if you know what's good for you. Do you hear?"

"Well, I hear all right, but I am not going to do it until you answer, just the same."

"No?" mused the giant. "Then, as I want to get rid of you I suppose I had better answer right away."

"I'm waiting," said Ray. "I did your errand, but I don't like the way it turned out. I'll give you the question again—is Billy Bird in here?"

"Oh, I understand your question all right," chuckled the

giant, dropping his teeth and gobbling them up again. Here's my answer: Yes, Billy Bird is in here."

"Then we want to see him."

"Suppose I say you can't?"

"Suppose I tell you that I don't leave this place till I do?"

"Don't be sassy, boy."

"Then don't you be aggravating. We are not here to interfere with Billy's business. We want to speak to him—that's all."

"Cheeky!" growled the giant. "Decidedly cheeky. Still, I suppose the cheapest way is to humor you. Wait a moment. I'll see what he says."

He slammed the door in their faces and left them standing there in the moonlight. They could hear his footsteps retreating along the passage and then all was still.

"Ray," whispered Fred, "for heaven's sake let's get out of this. I don't want you to think I'm afraid, but I don't like that man."

"You're not a bit more afraid than I am," retorted Ray, "but I don't go till I've seen Billy Bird and heard what he's got to say."

Fred made no further remark and the boys waited for a good ten minutes, but there was not a sound behind the door.

"He's fooling us!" cried Ray, suddenly. "By Jove, Fred, I don't believe he means to come back at all."

"I'm ready to believe any old thing about that dime museum freak," replied Fred, "but what do you propose to do?"

"Go in and find out for ourselves how the case stands with Billy Bird."

"Gee! No, you don't!"

"I will. Let go my coat, Fred Fielding. I was born a coward, but I'm going to make myself a brave man if I die for it. Let go of me, I say."

Ray caught at the latch and, to his surprise, found that the giant had not fastened the door and, stranger still, there stood the lantern on the floor inside.

"Come on, Fred," he cried, seizing it and running along the passage. "If Billy Bird is in this building I'll blame soon find it out."

Inspired by Ray's boldness, Fred hurried on.

Reaching the end of the passage, Ray threw open another door, which opened upon a long room with many windows—the room in which the lights had been seen.

It was entirely vacant. Nothing to be seen but a number of old boxes and plenty of dust.

It seemed simply incredible that only a short while before this very room had been alive with moving figures and ablaze with light.

But Ray did not hesitate.

Away over at the other end of the long room he could see the top of a staircase leading down to the floor below.

"Come on, Fred!" he cried, and he hurried to the stairs and ran down to the lower floor, coming against a door which, upon being opened, brought them into the yard on the side of the building toward the lake.

"Gee! Look there!" shouted Fred, but Ray, without answering, dashed on to the bulkhead.

A good-sized sailboat was just putting off on the lake.

There were two figures on board, one the giant, who was handling the sheet and tiller with no little skill.

The other was Billy Bird himself, and he leaned far over the rail and, pulling off his hat, waved it at the boys.

"Good-by, Fred!" he shouted. "Good-by, Ray! Say good-by to all the fellows for me, for you will never see me again."

The sail filled and the boat stood off shore.

Billy Bird sat down beside the giant and never even looked around nor paid the slightest heed to the repeated cries of the two astonished boys.

CHAPTER VI.

WHAT HAPPENED ON THE LAKE.

Ray and Fred hardly knew how they got back to dormitory No. 10, for every instant of the way it was nothing but speculation about this mysterious affair in which they had played such a prominent part.

Fred gave Ray a boost and he managed to climb on top of the fence and to pull his schoolfellow up after him.

There was little trouble in pulling themselves up to the window, for, truth told, the boys had done this before, for it is not always safe to assume that a schoolboy is snug in bed when there is a window and plenty of bedclothes handy.

Once in the room the two boys kept on talking about the matter until morning, and then the very first thing they went to Dr. Whiteside's apartments and made a clean breast of the affair and were roundly called down for not having done it before.

"You ought to have come to me, boys, no matter what the hour was," said the doctor. "This is a very serious matter. I am astonished, Whitcomb, that a boy of your common sense should not have better appreciated the situation. There was still time to rescue that unfortunate boy, but now it is quite too late. Still, I shall pass it over, for I have no doubt you thought you were acting for the best."

"I assure you I did, sir," replied Ray, penitently. "I feel terribly about it. I'm sure my father would be willing to employ a detective, and——"

"Never mind. I'll talk with you later. This is a strange business. Do you know anything about Billy Bird?"

"Not a thing, sir. He would never tell us where he lived or who his folks were, but probably you know."

"That's just where you are mistaken," replied the doctor. "I know nothing at all. Billy Bird came here himself and paid the money for two years' tuition in cash. He told me that he was an orphan and that for family reasons he could not tell me anything about his past history. He begged me so hard to receive him that I did so, although it is entirely against my usual custom, and I must say that he has proved himself a very excellent boy."

"Not a better fellow in the school, sir," cried Ray, warmly, "but there was always something peculiar about him. Doctor, I'm half wild about it. What shall we do?"

"Why, I shall think it over," replied Dr. Whiteside, "but as a matter of fact, boys, I don't see how I am justified in doing anything. Billy Bird came here of his own accord and he has evidently gone away because he wanted to. I am not his keeper and cannot so constitute myself under the circumstances. Really, if I knew where he was at the present moment I question very gravely if I should be justified in forcing him to return to the academy. I see nothing to do but to write after his name in my roll-book, 'Missing from school.'"

And that was the way the matter rested for the time.

Great was the excitement among Dr. Whiteside's pupils when the strange events of the night were made known and Ray and Fred were called upon to tell their story, again and again.

As soon as the day's session was over there was a grand stampede for the deserted village, and the ruinous old buildings were thoroughly ransacked.

Ray and Fred went with the rest, for they had a double motive in exploring the old machine shop by daylight.

Not a word had they said about the strange light and moving figures, though.

This they mutually agreed to keep to themselves, for both

had pretty much come to the conclusion that they must have been mistaken and that what they thought they saw was due to over-excitement.

At least each said this to the other, but neither one believed it himself, and we will mention as a strict secret that Ray and Fred let themselves out of the dormitory window the very next night and went down to the deserted village again in hopes that the ghostly exhibition might be repeated, but they only had their labor for their pains.

So the days passed and the strange disappearance of Billy Bird still remained a mystery.

Dr. Whiteside, at his own expense, put a private detective on the case, but with no better result than spending a considerable sum of money to no purpose whatever, so at last the matter was allowed to drop, and after Billy Bird's name on the roll-book was written in great black letters:

MISSING FROM SCHOOL.

The days came and went and the time for the great canoe race drew near.

One Saturday early in May it was determined to put in a few hours' practice on the lake, so the big wagon belonging to the school was hitched up and four of the canoes, those belonging to Ray, Fred and the two next best canoeists, who were Joe Tyler and Eddie Blake, went down to the lake.

Joe Quigley was now ruled out of the race, much to the disgust of the conceited fellow.

But Joe had learned a lesson by his accident. He wanted to be popular, so he publicly thanked Ray for saving his life, and on this day he invited Carrie James, Olive Moore and Mamie Sheldon to go out with him on the Water Witch, a handsome new sailboat, which his father had recently bought him, and was now lying at Brown's landing, a little below the deserted village.

It was a beautiful day and the young canoeists soon got started in good shape.

The run was to be for about a mile right out into the lake and then to beat back to Brown's Landing.

The out run was performed successfully, but the beating back part did not work, for, as it happened, the wind shifted so that all they could do was to sail before it on the home run.

Ray had been in the lead going out and Fred second, and the canoes soon assumed the same order going back.

Ray's dainty little craft went skimming over the water almost as fast as the wind itself.

As he neared the shore he saw Joe Quigley just putting out in the Water Witch.

As usual, Joe was a day behind the fair.

He had had trouble getting started and he was in trouble now, for he had some wild notion in his head that he understood managing a boat and could sail against the wind without tacking, but he soon found out his error and when Ray came flying up there was Joe with his sail flapping and three screaming girls on his hands.

"Look out, Joe! You'll run me down!" shouted Ray.

"Oh, save us, Ray! Save us! We shall be drowned!" Carrie James cried out.

"Port your helm, Joe!" shouted Ray. "Port your helm, you fool!"

Joe tried, but the trouble was he "ported" his helm the wrong way.

Ray changed his course to avoid the collision, which would have been inevitable if he had maintained it.

As he did so, to his utter amazement, he saw a boy close beside him in the water, swimming with all his clothes on toward the canoe

"Oh, good gracious, Ray!" screamed Olive Moore. "Look, Ray! Look!"

"Ray!" yelled Fred, whose canoe was close behind him. "Oh, Ray! It's Billy Bird!"

At the same instant the swimmer uttered a despairing cry, threw up his arms and sank out of sight.

"Save him, Ray!" cried Mamie Sheldon and Carrie James in one breath.

Ray was ready. He needed no urging.

Without an instant's hesitation he tumbled overboard into the lake.

CHAPTER VII.

IS THIS BILLY BIRD?

Ray Whitcomb was at his old tricks again—saving people from getting drowned.

And Ray knew just how to do it, too.

In a moment he came up to the surface of the lake supporting the drowning boy.

There was no fear of being pulled down by this boy's struggle, either, for he was entirely unconscious. His head sank down upon Ray's shoulder and he hung to his supporting arm, a dead weight.

"Lend me a hand, Fred," called Ray. "We had better get him into my canoe."

Fred had caught Ray's canoe and made it fast to his own.

Joe Quigley meanwhile made a wild tack and was now heading for the point, which, of course, was exactly where he did not want to go.

With Fred's help Ray managed to get the boy into the canoe without upsetting it.

It was a ticklish job, though, and worse to get in himself afterward, but as Fred often found occasion to remark, Ray could do "any old thing with a canoe," and at last he had accomplished all this and took up the paddle again.

"Going ashore, I suppose?" asked Fred.

"Of course. Come on."

"You bet I won't leave you to go alone. What do you think, Ray, is he dead?"

"No. He'll come out all right. I see you looking at me, Fred, and I know you want my opinion. I can't give it to you. I don't know whether it's Billy or not. If it is he is greatly changed."

Fred had grasped the situation. The rescued boy looked like Billy Bird most certainly, but he was very pale and thin and his clothes were mere rags.

At first glance any one would have taken him for the missing boy, but closer observation made both Ray and Fred question as to whether or not they were right.

But whatever the boy was, there he was to be saved, and Ray and Fred paddled for the boat landing for dear life.

Ray had taken care to place the half-drowned boy face down in the canoe and this probably saved him.

The water began to run out of his mouth before they had gone far.

As they went skimming over the water Ray caught sight of a small sailboat coming around the point.

It was not the Water Witch. Joe Quigley had taken another wild tack now and was standing off into the lake when there was no sort of doubt that he meant to come up to the canoe.

As for the other boys, they evidently did not understand what had occurred, for they kept right on with their race.

"What boat is that, Ray?" shouted Fred, as the strange craft made her appearance.

"I'll never tell you," replied Ray. "Don't know her at all. There seem to be two or three fellows on her, though, and they are all looking this way."

"I'll bet you what you like, Billy Bird came off that boat, if it is Billy."

"If it is? It must be, Fred."

"There they go. They are standing off up the lake. Shall I give them the call?"

"No, don't! We have got all we can do to save this fellow. We don't want to muss with anything else."

So Fred remained silent. He saw one of the men put an opera glass to his eyes and survey the canoes.

Then all but the one who was handling the boat crouched down as though they wanted to avoid being seen, and the boat, catching the breeze, stood away up the lake, making great speed.

By this time Ray had made the float at the boat-house and Fred came spinning up after him.

They sprang out and drew their canoes up out of the water.

"Now then, boy," cried Ray, "out with him. He's alive, all right, but he needs attention or he may die on our hands yet."

They lifted the half-drowned boy between them and carried him into the boat-house.

He groaned faintly, but did not speak.

"I tell you, Ray, if it's Billy how we can make sure!" exclaimed Fred.

"How?"

"Billy has a big mole on his back. I've often noticed it when we were in swimming."

"You are right. I have thought of that. Say, it must be Billy. It's exactly like him, but oh, he's fallen away so! Looks as though he had been starved almost to death."

"We shall soon know," replied Fred. "I guess you're right, though. I guess it's Billy, fast enough, now that I came to look at him closer. We'll rip his clothes off and roll him in a blanket. There's some whisky in the locker; you know you had it put there for just such a case as this. We'll give him a drink—do you think the water is all out of him, Ray?"

"I think it is," replied Ray. "You get the whisky, I'll undress him."

"Yes, and you had better undress yourself, too, or you'll have pneumonia sure," replied Fred, as he hurried off after the bottle.

Ray lost no time. Stripping off the boy's clothes, he rolled him in a blanket and poured a small quantity of the whisky down his throat.

All doubt that it was their missing school-fellow was now banished from the boys' minds, for there was the mole just as they had expected to see it.

"Billy! Say, Billy, wake up! Speak to us, old man!"

The boy's eyes were open now, and he was sitting up on the floor leaning back against the wall.

Instead of making any answer, he only stared at the boys in a dull, half-witted sort of way.

"Don't you know me, Billy?" demanded Ray.

He shook his head.

"No," he said, faintly, "I don't know you at all."

"Look close at me. You can't help but know me. I'm Ray—don't you know Ray. Here's Fred, too."

"No, I don't know you. You don't know me," was the reply.

"Not Billy—no!"

"What's that?" cried Ray. "Aren't you Billy Bird?"

"Bird—yes! Bird," muttered the boy.

"Come, come, Billy! Brace up! Pull yourself together!" cried Fred. "It will be all right in a little while."

"Not Billy—not Billy!" was the muttered answer. "Bird—my name is Bird!"

CHAPTER VIII.

HOW THE GIANT LOOKED THROUGH THE WINDOW-PANE.

Now all this that we have just described was the beginning of a strange state of affairs.

For nearly half an hour Ray and Fred worked over the boy and the other boys of the canoe club came in and joined them, but the mystery remained unsolved.

Some were sure that the boy was Billy, others were equally sure that it wasn't, although all admitted that he greatly resembled the boy who was missing from school.

As for the boy himself, little or nothing could be got out of him.

When they asked him his name he would answer "Bird," but when they tried to call him Billy he would not have it, but beyond this he would not say anything at all.

He just sat on the chair to which they lifted him, staring at the boys stupidly.

It was no use to try to get anything more out of him. All the boys took a hand at it, but in each case the result was the same.

Ray searched his clothes, but the result did not help them a bit, for the pockets contained nothing.

It was certain, however, that they were not the clothes Billy Bird had worn.

Ray stuck to it that the boy was not Billy Bird; Fred was inclined to think he might be and Joe Quigley was sure of it.

Fortunately, there were several old suits of clothes in the boat-house, so Ray dressed the boy in one and put on another himself and then the girls were called in to see what they could make out of the mystery.

There was the same difference of opinion.

Carrie James was sure that the mysterious boy was Billy. Olive Moore was equally certain that it was not Billy, and as for Mamie Sheldon, she first declared that it was Billy and then switched around to the opposite opinion.

At last everybody got so mixed up about the matter that no one knew what to think.

The boy meanwhile just sat there staring. He got so at last that he would speak to no one but Ray; when the others tried to make him talk he just stared and held his tongue.

"We ought to have a doctor to see him," declared Fred.

"Better take him up to the school and let Dr. Whiteside decide the question," replied Ray, and this is just what they did.

The boy had somewhat recovered his strength now, but still he seemed very weak and nervous. He clung to Fred's arm and kept saying:

"Don't let them talk to me! Don't let them talk to me! I can't bear it. Please don't."

"Nobody shall bother you," declared Ray. "I won't let them. Just you come along with me."

So Ray walked on ahead with him and reached the academy a little in advance of the rest.

Dr. Whiteside was greatly surprised at his strange visitor, but he declared at once that in spite of the very strong resemblance, the boy was not Billy Bird.

"I am positive of it, Ray," he said; "he is a little taller and the shape of his head is certainly different. There is something

very strange about all this. It must be thoroughly investigated. You leave the boy to me. Get on your wheel and ride to the village and fetch Dr. Prout as quick as you can. You did just right to bring the boy here. I shall be able to make something out of him, you may be very sure."

That was Dr. Whiteside's opinion, but he was mistaken.

Neither he nor Dr. Prout succeeded in making anything out of the boy, although both worked over him for a long time.

Of course, Ray and Fred could not intrude on Dr. Whiteside, and as they were not sent for they remained ignorant of what had taken place until just before bedtime, when Ray was sent for by the principal.

When he entered the room he found the strange boy stretched out upon Dr. Whiteside's lounge, sound asleep.

"Well, Ray," said the doctor, motioning our hero to a chair, "this mystery has been made still more mysterious by that boy you brought me. What do you think of him now?"

"Why, he seems to be asleep, sir," replied Ray, rather puzzled at the question.

"Just so," said the doctor. "Well, Ray, for all I've been able to get out of him since you left this room he might as well have been asleep all the time."

"What does the doctor say?"

"He says the fellow is suffering from the long-continued influence of a certain preparation of morphine, and that it will take a week at least to restore him to his right mind. In the meantime he leads us to infer that the boy can't be Billy Bird."

"Then, altogether, it is just as much of a mystery as ever."

"Just the same. He fell asleep before the doctor left and he has been sleeping ever since. I didn't want to disturb him, so I just let him lie where he was, and now, Ray, I have a job for you."

"Anything I can do I'm sure I shall be only too happy, sir," replied Ray, promptly. "Want me to get him into bed?"

"No; you needn't do that, but I do want to go to bed myself. Stay here with him, Ray. Stay till morning, if necessary; you can be excused for to-morrow and can sleep all day if you like. You see, I don't care to bring anybody else into this matter if it can be helped."

Ray consented readily, only asking that Fred might be allowed to watch with him, to which the doctor agreed.

That was the way that Ray and Fred came to find themselves playing dominoes on Dr. Whiteside's study table at midnight.

They played game after game; it came along between one and two o'clock and they were still playing and all this time the sleeper had never moved.

Meanwhile, it had begun to rain outside and the wind howled dismally. Fred grew sleepy and began to yawn so that at last he declared he could play no longer.

"I'll just lie down across the lower end of the lounge for a few moments and take a snooze, Ray," he said. "It will brighten me up so that I shan't feel sleepy again and nothing. Wake me in half an hour and then take your turn."

Ray made no objection and Fred was asleep in two minutes, stretched out at the feet of the mysterious boy, with his head cushioned up against the back of the lounge.

Ray let him sleep the half hour out and then awoke him and lay down himself.

"Are you sure you can keep awake, Fred?" he asked, as he threw himself down, letting his feet hang over the edge of the lounge.

"Sure I am," replied Fred. "You go right to sleep now and don't fret about me. I'll wake you up in half an hour and then we will have another game; say, he didn't stir while I was lying down, did he?"

"Never a stir. He lay all the time just as you see him now."

"Strange, isn't it?"

"Mighty strange. I have an idea that when he wakes up he'll be all right and be able to give an account of himself."

"Let's hope so," replied Fred, yawning sleepily.

Ray soon dropped off and Fred tried to keep awake by reading a book.

It was just about the worst thing he could have done.

In a few moments his head fell forward and the book dropped out of his hand.

He roused up and stared around, then, felling his arms upon the table, laid his head upon them.

In a second there were three sleepers in the room instead of two.

It was a pity Fred could not have kept awake a second longer for, as always happens, he picked out just the wrong time for sleeping on his post.

He had scarcely dropped off when a slight noise was heard outside the window, which opened directly on the lawn in front of the school that stretched down to the road.

Of course, Fred did not hear it. If he had he probably would have turned and looked at the window and trouble might have been saved.

There, pressed against the pane, was a man's face.

Perhaps Fred might have not recognized it even if he had seen it, but Ray would.

It was the face of the giant.

As he peered into the room his false teeth tumbled down and he gobbled them up again.

Then the face drew away from the window and disappeared.

CHAPTER IX.

RAY IN TROUBLE.

Ray slept on, so did Fred. As for the stranger, he slept, too. Another half hour crept by. The wind howled more dismally than ever. It was a nasty night upon the lake and to be on Lake Michigan in a big storm is, as everybody knows, as bad as being away out at sea.

Suddenly there came a queer, scratching noise upon the window-pane.

It was like the noise a diamond would make cutting glass, which was not at all strange, for this was just what was going on outside.

Suddenly there was a tap and a pane of glass, cut all the way around, slipped down out of a place, a hand being quickly thrust through the opening at the same instant.

It was most skillfully done. The hand caught the pane, turned it and drew it out through the opening.

Then, an instant later, the hand came again and this time reached up to the window fastening.

Still the three boys slept on.

There was danger close at hand for one of them—serious danger.

Suddenly the window was resealed and a man, whose face was almost concealed by a grout, shaggy, black beard, looked in.

He said something in a low tone and in a foreign language, the remark being evidently addressed to some person outside, and then sprang boldly through the open window into the room.

Immediately a second man appeared at the window; he was dark and swarthy, with little beady black eyes and a fierce black mustache.

The man who had entered the room, scarcely glancing at Fred, slipped to the lounge and looked down upon the two

sleepers in a puzzled sort of way and then turned and whispered something to his companion, which brought an answer in the same foreign tongue.

Whatever was said it seemed to be quite satisfactory to the man, for he immediately proceeded to act.

Bending down, he picked up Ray as easily as if he had been a baby and passed him out of the window to the other man.

Ray groaned and slightly struggled, but did not awake.

It was not to be expected, for the man, before picking him up off the lounge, pulled out a pocket handkerchief saturated it with some strong-smelling stuff from a small bottle and pressed it tightly over the boy's nose and mouth.

Ray was chloroformed.

The job was so skillfully done that he never fully awake, but just struggled involuntarily.

The man who received him carried him out of the gate and then laid him down in the muddy road.

He did not seem to be so strong as the other man, nor able to hold Ray, so he waited for him to come up.

Now they began to talk in English.

"Sure you have got the right boy?" asked the man with the mustache.

"Yes," growled the other.

"But there were two asleep on the lounge."

"Don't care. I've got the lower one—that's what he said."

"Don't know whether he did or not," growled the other.

"You never remember—you never get anything straight."

The man with the beard swore, and picked Ray up again.

"If you can't carry him I can," he said, and, making just nothing of the boy's weight, he hurried down the road until they came to the end of the academy fence, where a horse and covered wagon stood waiting for them.

The man with the mustache lifted the curtain of the wagon and the other put Ray in without ceremony.

Both climbed upon the seat and the man with the mustache, picking up the reins, they drove off down the road in the direction of the deserted village.

This was their destination. A little later they turned in among the old buildings and stopped.

There was a light upstairs over the machine shop, just as Ray and Fred had seen it the night Billy Bird disappeared.

At the sound of the wagon-wheels the door at the top of the outside steps opened and a head came out into the rain.

"Hello!" called a voice. "That you, Taller?"

"Yes, it is," replied the man with the beard.

"Got the boy?"

"Yes."

"Good enough! The boss' orders are for you to put him aboard the boat. We are not through here yet. You can come up the stairs and knock on the door and I'll pass your money out to you after you are through."

"All right," replied Taller. He got out, lifted Ray, who was still quite unconscious, out of the wagon and walked off with him, taking his way down to the bulkhead.

Here two large sailboats lay tied up to the timber. The wind was blowing a fierce gale and the boats were pounding heavily.

It was impossible for Taller to get aboard either one with Ray in his arms, and he seemed to be doubtful now over which one to choose.

He settled it by tossing Ray upon the deck of the nearest boat.

The unconscious boy fell heavily and rolled along the deck against the low guards with such force that he went over into the lake.

"Gee!" gasped Taller. "I've drowned him! Well, let him drown. I can't go after him. I'll go up and collect my money and light out."

Without making the slightest attempt to find out what had become of Ray, Taller turned on his heel and hurried away, leaving the unfortunate boy to his fate.

CHAPTER X.

"BURN ME TO ASHES, THIS IS THE WRONG BOY!"

Ray had got himself into serious trouble.

Although the man Taller did not intend to drown him, he came very near doing it, just the same.

If Ray had gone overboard off the sailboat ten minutes sooner than he did he would have lost his life to a certainty, but as it was the chloroform was beginning to lose its hold and the shock of being suddenly tumbled into cold water brought him back to consciousness at once.

He did not realize at all what had happened to him, however.

All he knew was that he was in the water and wanted to get out, so he grabbed the rocking boat and managed to pull himself on deck, where he sank down, half-unconscious again and without having the slightest idea where he was.

He was cold, shivery, wet to the skin and his head was whirling like a top.

He had just sense enough to know that he was on a boat, but he thought it was his own and, as it happened, so it was. It was the Swan, a fair-sized sailboat, which ought to have been then at anchor off the school boat-house.

Twice during the season boats had been stolen from the schoolhouse anchorage and here was a third case, but to Ray's muddled mind no such ideas came.

It was his boat and he was wet and wanted dry clothes. He knew there was an old suit of his in a locker down in the cabin and he had the key in his pocket.

He staggered to his feet, stumbled into the cabin, lit a lamp, opened the locker and took out the clothes.

Then it began to seem rather odd that he should be on the boat at all and he wondered what it meant, but to save his life he could not remember where he had been last or why he was on board the Swan.

Pondering upon these mysteries, Ray pulled off his wet clothes and rubbed himself down with a coarse jack towel.

The exercise roused him up a bit and he was able to dress himself, but still his memory would not come back.

"Why am I here? Why am I here?" he kept saying to himself.

He wondered also why his head ached so and what it all meant, anyhow.

At this time a dreadfully drowsy feeling seized him.

He felt as though he would have been willing to give his life for a few moments' sleep.

There was the bunk—his own bunk. The result was just what might have been expected under the circumstances.

In a moment Ray lay stretched out in it, sound asleep. It would have rather surprised Taller if he had happened to look into the cabin just then.

But Taller, with the price of his evil work in his pocket, was making for the neighboring town, not caring one rap whether his victim was alive or dead.

An hour passed. The Swan pitched about in great shape, for the storm continued to increase.

Ray could not have sailed her across Lake Michigan that night, but there were those in the deserted village who meant to make a try of it.

The next thing Ray knew he suddenly awoke, feeling quite himself, but with absolutely no recollection of anything that had occurred since he lay down upon the lounge in Dr. White-side's study at the foot of the mysterious boy.

He started up and stared around.

The swinging lamp over the cabin table showed him where he was, and it was swinging for fair, for the sailboat was now plunging ahead across the lake at a fearful rate.

"Great Scott! What is all this?" gasped Ray. "Why, I am on board the Swan! How in the world did I get here? Blest if she hasn't gone adrift in the storm!"

He was about to get out of the bunk and hurry up on deck to find out what it all meant when suddenly heavy footsteps were heard descending the cabin stairs and two rough-looking foreigners, dark and swarthy, with heavy black beards and deep-set eyes, came tumbling into the cabin.

They were dressed in oilskins and dripping with the spray thrown upon them by the storm.

They began rattling away to each other in some foreign language and the biggest of the two, opening Ray's locker, took out a whisky bottle and helped himself without the aid of a glass; his example was followed by his companion and then both sat down at the table and lighted cigarettes.

Ray was pretty well frightened by this time and had wit enough to pretend to be asleep.

What had happened to him he could only guess at, but he could not help connecting it all with the strange disappearance of Billy Bird.

"They've stolen my boat and they seem to have stolen me, too," he thought. "Who are those fellows? What in the world am I to do?"

He kept one eye open and listened.

One of the men was hammering on the table emphasizing some remark when all at once the other sprang up and ran to the bunk, seized Ray by the collar of his coat and dragged him bodily out upon the floor.

"What's the matter with you?" cried the other in English. "What are you trying to do?"

"What am I trying to do? Why, I'm trying to find out what all this means!" answered the man. "Burn me to ashes, this is the wrong boy!"

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE POWER OF THE GIANT.

The two men stared at Ray, who, frightened though he was, kept perfectly quiet.

"There has been some terrible mistake here," he thought. "My only hope is to keep perfectly cool."

With his hand still clutching Ray's collar the man rattled away to the other in the same strange language.

At last he pushed Ray roughly into a chair, saying, in English, "Sit down!"

"I'll do as you say, gentlemen," replied Ray, seating himself. "I don't know whether you are aware of it, but this happens to be my boat. I'd like to know how you came here?"

"Answer him, Slocovich," said the man on the other side of the table; "my English was no good."

"I'll answer you, boy, by asking the same question," replied Slocovich.

"I can't answer you, then, for I don't know," said Ray.

"Don't know?"

"No."

"Those your wet clothes in the corner there?"

"Yes, but I don't know how they got there."

"Do you belong to Dr. Whiteside's Academy?"

"Yes, I do."

"What's your name?"

"Ray Whitcomb."

"Ah, ha! Then you know Billy Bird?"

"Of course I do. Can you tell me anything about him? I'll see that you are well paid if——"

"Ta-ta! Stop that! I'm not looking for money. I think I know you now, boy. You are the fellow who did the rescue act on the lake yesterday? Am I right or wrong?"

"Why, I suppose——"

"Don't suppose!" cried the man, fiercely. "Answer me! Right or wrong?"

"Right, then."

"Oh, yes, I thought so. Well, now, look here, young fellow, I see through this business. There has been a mistake made. The boy you rescued is the boy who ought to be here in your place now. I am sorry for you. It is too late to change matters. We are away out on the lake and we can't go back, but there may be a way of saving you yet when we meet Mr. Jacks."

"Who is Mr. Jacks? What am I to be saved from?" asked Ray. "I don't want to get into trouble myself, nor to make trouble for others. If you will explain what all this means I——"

"Hello there, below! She's a-coming!" shouted a voice from the deck.

"Stay where you are till we come back!" said Slocovich, fiercely. "Remember, boy, your only chance lies in obeying me. If you dare to show yourself on deck I'll shoot you dead. Do you understand?"

"I'll stay here," said Ray, thoroughly frightened.

"Get back into your bunk," added Slocovich. "Be quick about it. Don't you dare to move till I give the word."

Ray crawled back into the bunk.

The instant he lay down, Slocovich seized a heavy tarpaulin, which Ray had already observed lying in one corner, and pulled it away from a pile of small wooden boxes which it had concealed.

What was in the boxes Ray could only guess, and he was given no time to study them, for Slocovich hung the tarpaulin up in front of the bunk, nailing it to the woodwork above.

This cut off Ray's view entirely.

"Move that tarpaulin and look out into the cabin and I'll twist your neck for you," hissed Slocovich. "Burn me to ashes if I don't!"

Ray made no reply, but just lay still, with his brain all in a whirl.

He heard the hoarse whistle of a lake steamer and then voices shouting.

The steamer and the Swan seemed to come together. There was more shouting and then heavy footsteps were heard on the cabin stairs.

Ray listened breathlessly. He did not dare to move the tarpaulin, but he had taken out his knife and quietly cut a narrow slit in it. By keeping his eye close to this he was able to see what was going on.

They were moving the boxes—carrying them up out of the cabin.

The men who did the work seemed to be all foreigners, and Slocovich and his companions were not among them.

Suddenly, by an accident, Ray got a clue to what it was all about, for one of the boxes fell to the floor and broke open and he rolled a great quantity of new, bright quarters.

There was a good deal of swearing as the men gathered round and after nailing the box together they restored them to their place.

"Counterfeiters!" thought Ray. "I'm in for it. What on earth shall I do?"

He did the only thing he could have done under the circumstances, and that was to lie perfectly still.

When the boxes had all been removed he heard the steamer pull away and then, after a moment, steps were heard on the cabin stairs again and suddenly the tarpaulin was pulled away from in front of the bunk.

There stood Slocovich and the giant.

The queer old man was drenched with the spray; his battered plug hat lay back on his head and his big pop eyes seemed to be darting forward as he stared at the bunk.

"The wrong boy! Did you pay that fraud?" he snapped.

Then his teeth dropped down and he gobbled them up with a fearful scowl at poor Ray.

Shaking his long, dirty forefinger in the boy's face, he hissed out, in his theatrical way:

"So much for your meddling, Master Ray Whitcomb! You would not keep your hands off my business, so there is nothing left for me but to put my hand on yours. Get up out of that bunk—get up, I say!"

"You seem to be master here on my boat, so I suppose I have got to obey you," replied Ray, rising; "look out for yourself, though. You may go a step too far. I'm not like poor Billy Bird. I've got friends, and my friends will spare no money to——"

"Shut up!" roared the giant, seizing Ray by the throat and holding him with an iron hand.

He hissed out some words in a foreign language.

Instantly Slocovich flung his arm about Ray from behind and, drawing the boy close up against him, held him as though he was in a vise.

"I've got him, Mr. Jacks. He can't move now," he said.

"That's right," said the giant, answering to the name. "Hold him, Slocy. I'll be ready in a minute."

He drew from his pocket a small leather case like the case of a cigarette holder and also a bottle.

Out of the case he took a hypodermic syringe and thrust the needle into the colorless liquid which the bottle contained.

"What are you going to do to me?" panted Ray, sick with the horror of his situation.

"This!" hissed Mr. Jacks, pushing back the boy's head with his left hand, while with the right he drove the needle into poor Ray's neck.

A strange thrill shot through Ray's whole body, from head to foot.

Slocovich let go of him. Mr. Jacks stood back, but Ray remained staring into vacancy.

"How do you feel?" demanded Jacks, with all the curiosity of a doctor questioning a patient.

"How do I feel?" repeated Ray. "Why, I—I don't know how I feel."

He stared stupidly at Mr. Jacks, his face wearing the same dazed expression that he himself had noticed upon the face of the mysterious boy up at the school.

"Feel well?" cried Mr. Jacks.

"I do feel well," said Ray, stupidly.

"Feel happy?" cried Mr. Jacks, raising his voice to a still higher key.

"I do feel happy! Oh, I'm so happy!" replied Ray, his eyes sparkled and his face beamed all over.

"Laugh!" shouted Mr. Jacks.

"Ha! ha! ha! Ha! ha! ha!" Ray burst into peals of laughter, keeping it up until Mr. Jacks suddenly shouted:

"Stop!"

Instantly Ray stopped laughing and stood staring stupidly at the two men.

"It works all right," said Slocovich.

"Seems to," replied Mr. Jacks. "One trial more, though."
 "Dance!" he shouted. And Ray began to caper about the room, throwing out his legs in the wildest kind of way.

"That will do all right, Sloky," whispered Mr. Jacks, as they watched him. "He must never leave us alive. We must get the other one, too, of course. I suppose we shall be able to get some work out of him, although he don't look very strong."

"Stop him, for gracious sake," said Slokovich, turning his head. "It always makes me sick to see them."

"Stop!" shouted Mr. Jacks. Then it was, "Get into that bunk!" and then, "Go to sleep."

And Ray obeyed each command in turn.

"We'll go on deck and have a look at things, Sloky," said Mr. Jacks. "It's a bad storm, and I'm not sure about our being able to get over to the island."

When they left the cabin a minute later Ray was sleeping as peacefully as a little child.

CHAPTER XII.

IS THIS THE SWAN?

There was great excitement in Dr. Whiteside's Academy when it was found that Ray Whitcomb was missing.

Poor Fred Fielding went almost crazy over the affair. Indeed, at one time Dr. Whiteside felt seriously alarmed about the boy.

It was an awful shock for Fred when he realized what had happened.

When he awoke and found the window open and Ray and the mysterious stranger missing, for the boy was gone, too, Fred thought that Ray must have gone out after their patient of his own accord.

But the missing pane of glass aroused Fred's suspicions, and the wagon tracks confirmed them. Dr. Whiteside was aroused and then a search began.

No need to tell all that happened.

Two weeks had now passed since that stormy night, and still there came no tidings of Ray.

It was a dreadful thing. When Fred was called upon to face Ray's father he broke down completely and that was the time good Dr. Whiteside thought the poor boy would surely go mad.

Detectives were at once put on the case and no money spared.

The missing boat was thought to be a clew and some of the detectives advanced the theory that Ray had gone off with the stranger of his own accord.

Of course, Mr. Whitcomb would listen to no such suggestion and the search continued. The old buildings at the deserted village were thoroughly ransacked, but without avail. Every means was tried to trace Ray, every clew exhausted, money was spent like water, but all in vain.

At last, after two weeks, although the search still continued, Dr. Whiteside's Academy settled down to business once more.

As it had been in the case of Billy Bird, so it came to be with Ray Whitcomb.

Against his name in Dr. Whiteside's roll-book was written these ominous words.

MISSING FROM SCHOOL!

The race came off and was won by Eddie Blake, who never dreamed that he had a show.

Fred pulled out and declined to have anything to do with it. Poor Fred was a changed boy now.

Every spare moment of his time was spent in hovering around the deserted village, for he was firm in the belief that if a clew to the mystery was ever found it would be found there.

Night after night Fred slipped out of the school, by Dr. Whiteside's permission, and visited the ruinous old shops.

Dr. Whiteside was a man of sense. He realized the state of the boy's mind and did not refuse him. Twice he went with Fred and once they spent half the night together watching the buildings from the hill, but with no result.

One evening, between two and three weeks after Ray's disappearance, as Fred was about starting out for the hill as usual, he was surprised to meet Joe Quigley "laying for him" a little way down the road.

Joe was bursting with excitement.

"Say, Fred," he exclaimed, "I hope you will excuse me for interfering with your business, but, of course, all the fellows are on to your game and know where you go nights. Now, I haven't got anything against Ray and I'd like to see this mystery cleared up, and——"

"Stop it!" cried Fred. "Great Scott, come to the point, Joe Quigley. Do you or do you not know anything about Ray?"

"Well, now, you needn't go on like that," said Joe. "No, I don't know anything about Ray, but I did see the Swan to-night on the lake."

"No!" cried Fred. "Oh, Joe, is it true?"

"Of course it is or I wouldn't say it," replied Joe. "I was out alone in the Water Witch and the wind was against me. I'm sailing the boat better now, and——"

"Oh, go on! Go on!" pleaded Fred. "If you don't come to the point I shall go mad."

"Why, the point is that the Swan is lying at the bulkhead down there at the deserted village now!" cried Joe. "At least it was when I left. I've run just as tight as I could hook it to tell you, Fred, and that's straight goods."

"I'm off!" shouted Fred, and away he dashed.

"Not without me!" cried Joe Quigley. "Ray saved my life all right and even if I do get a little funny at times I don't forget it. I'm with you, old man!"

"Run, then!" shouted Fred. "Run!"

And run the two boys did. There never was such sprinting between the school and the lake shore.

Fred slackened speed as he drew near the hill, where he could look down upon the deserted village.

"Is she still there?" panted Joe, as he came bounding up.

Fred was so winded that he could scarcely speak, but he pointed down at a handsome sailboat which lay alongside the bulkhead, whispering:

"Oh, Joe! You were right! It's the Swan!"

CHAPTER XIII.

FRED AND JOE SEE RAY.

Fred Fielding and Joe Quigley had made a most important discovery.

The boat lying at the bulkhead in front of the old buildings which passed under the name of the deserted village was most certainly the Swan.

Of course, it was by no means certain that this had anything to do with the disappearance of Ray Whitcomb, but it was,

nevertheless, a fact that the Swan was Ray's boat and that it disappeared on the same night he did.

Fred was inclined to connect the two things together, but whether he was right or wrong in this remained to be seen.

"Joe, there is just one thing to do," said Fred, earnestly. "We have got to go down there and find out what this means."

Joe laid his hand on Fred's shoulder and held him back.

"Don't!" he said. "Don't do it, Fred!"

"What do you take me for, Quigley?" demanded Fred, angrily. "Do you think I'm a coward? I'll let you know——"

"Hold on, now," interrupted Joe. "Of course you can go on that way if you want to. That's the usual style with the fellows when they are dealing with me. I know I'm clumsy and a bit stupid, but I don't think I'm quite a fool."

"Do you mean to say that I am, then?" demanded Fred, in a somewhat milder tone.

"No, no, no! I don't mean to say anything of the sort," said Joe. "It isn't that at all. Now, try and understand me, Fred. I think a lot more of Ray than you fellows suppose I do. I really want to help and this time I think I've got an idea if you will only let me pull with you."

"Well, that's all right," said Fred, in a still more friendly way. "Go ahead, Joe; tell me your idea."

"Why, it's just this way," said Joe. "If we go piking down there we'll be seen and ten to one get into trouble and, anyhow, we'll put whoever brought the Swan over here on their guard. What I say let's do is to run to the boat-house as fast as ever we can go, get out my Water Witch—oh, I'll let you do the sailing, so you needn't look at me—we'll come around here, for the Swan behind the point and follow her. Ten to one we'll find out then where Ray is, and like enough Billy Blud, too. In that way we may be able to do something, but the other way won't amount to anything at all."

It was a tremendously long speech for Joe Quigley to make, and it showed an amount of thought which Fred never supposed he possessed.

"Good for you, Joe!" he exclaimed. "It's a bully plan. We'll carry it out and I believe something will come of it; only one objection to the scheme that I see."

"What's that?" asked Joe.

"That Ray may be down in the deserted village now."

"And if he is we can't get him," said Joe. "You know that well enough. We've got to be foxy and work our cards right, but I think you will find that he isn't there."

"Come ahead," said Fred. "It's a case of follow my leader and you are the leader to-night, Joe."

Joe was immensely set up by this.

"Come on! We'll show those stupid detectives what we can do," he declared.

They ran to the boat-house, which was perhaps half a mile lower down the lake, and went to work on the Water Witch at once.

"Oh, hurry, Joe! Hurry!" Fred kept saying. "If they are gone before we can get back there I don't know what I shall do."

Joe was working for all he was worth, but the boat would not be got ready in a minute. In fact, it was fully three-quarters of an hour before they reached the boat-house just south of the deserted village, which Joe had spoken of as the point.

That's about such as he ran the Water Witch around. It was just as he had feared.

The Swan was gone.

"Too late!" he gasped. "Oh, Joe! I knew it would be!"

"No, it isn't too late, either," replied Joe. "There she is standing out into the lake."

"Oh, Joe, you are right. She's the best part of a mile away, too."

"All the better for us," said Joe. "Now we can follow her without running the risk of being seen. How far in this thing are you willing to go, Fred?"

"Any length to save Ray."

"Suppose we have to stay out all night?"

"Then all night it is. I have the doctor's permission and I'll make it all right with him about you."

"Settled," said Joe. "Fire away. I don't want to give any advice about sailing, Fred, for I know you consider me a regular dunce at it, but I'd go to the other tack if I was you. My idea is they are going to lead up the lake in a minute. It will give us a chance to tack again and cut in pretty close behind them when they do."

"But suppose they don't," replied Fred. "What then?"

"Why, then we are left—that's all."

"Well, all right. I said you were to be the leader, and I'll stick to it. It's your scheme, anyhow, Joe, not mine."

It was not a dark night at all, for the sky was cloudless and every star was out, but there was no moon and it was not possible to see who was on board the Swan. Fred strained his eyes, but could not make out even the trace of a figure. Following Joe's suggestion, he tacked, and in a few moments knew that he had made no mistake, for the Swan changed her course and headed up the lake.

"There!" cried Joe. "Now wait a minute and then strike in behind them."

"We had better take in sail, hadn't we, and stay as still as we can?"

"Yes. We might throw out a line, too, and pretend to be fishing."

"And let them pass us? They ought to go pretty near."

"That will be the correct scheme. We will let them go by. We won't tack at all."

There was but little wind, though what there was blew steadily enough.

The Water Witch bobbed about after the sail was down, but did not change her position much.

The boys got out their fishing lines and made a good bluff at being busy as the Swan drew near.

"She's going to run close to us," said Fred. "Joe, your plan has worked first-rate. We ought to be able to see who is on board now."

"What if we should see Ray?" asked Joe. "What would you do in that case?"

"I don't know. I suppose it would be foolish to try to do anything. Best way would be just to keep still and follow on."

"That's what I say," replied Joe, emphatically. Then, after a little, he exclaimed: "I can see a man in the cock-pit."

"So can I."

"There's another one forward on the lookout."

"You're right. She's got a load of something on deck."

"It's boxes—that's what it is."

"Yes, and there's a third fellow sitting on the pile."

Matters were getting decidedly interesting, for the Swan was now very clear.

The man on the lookout soon caught sight of the Water Witch.

The boys saw him adjust a big opera-glass and look at them and then suddenly they got the hail:

"Hello! hello! What are you fellows doing there?" he called out.

"Fishing!" shouted Fred.

"Can't you get fishing enough in the daytime? What brings you out on the lake at night?"

"We are after salt-water trout. Guess there's no law against fishing at night, is there?"

The man made no answer and a moment later the Swan shot past the boys, going by within twenty feet of them.

Fred could not make out that he had seen either of the two men before.

As for the one on the boxes, he sat with his head down, leaning on his hand and seemed to be asleep.

But as the Swan shot past he suddenly raised his head and looked at the boys.

"Great Scott!" gasped Fred. "It's Ray!"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE WHITE SLAVES.

Was it actually Ray sitting there on the boxes on the deck of the Swan?

It certainly was, and in order to explain how he came to be there we must return to the morning after his disappearance, for that was the next Ray knew anything from the moment Mr. Jacks, the giant, drove the hypodermic needle into his neck.

Ray woke up then to find himself lying upon a dirty bed, with an old blanket thrown over him.

He was sleepy and heavy that his first inclination was to turn over and close his eyes again, but just as he was about doing so some slight memory of what had occurred came back to him in a dim sort of way.

"Am I still on the Swan?" he thought. "No, no! This is no bunk—it's a bed. Let me see—let me see."

He sat up, but his head swam so that for the moment he could see nothing.

Then the mist seemed to clear away from before his eyes and he saw that he was lying in a room with just boards for walls and ceiling, and no carpet on the floor.

His clothes lay on a chair alongside the bed and in the room there were four other beds and on each one somebody was sleeping. Ray's mind was so muddled that he got a queer idea that he was in the dormitory at school and that Fred was in one bed and Billy Bird in another, but who the other two boys were he could not make out.

He passed his hand before his eyes and sank back again and was off asleep before he knew it and the next thing he did know a bell rang sharply and the man Slokovich came running into the room.

"Up, every one of you!" he called out. "Up, you lazy tramps!"

No one moved but Ray, and he only raised his head and stared.

It seemed to him then that it would be just impossible for him to get up, but Sloky, as Mr. Jacks had called him, soon showed Ray that such was not the case, for he stripped the bed clothes off of him and, catching hold of his feet, dragged him roughly off the bed.

Ray had all he could do to save himself from falling on the floor.

Sloky caught him and stood him on his feet and then passed on to the next bed, taking each sleeper in turn and serving him the same way, Ray watching him, half dazed.

They were all boys, none of them being much older than Ray himself, and each one looked just as stupid and ill-timed as he did.

Just how he felt can scarcely be described, but some idea of it may be had when we state that Ray saw that the boy nearest to him was Billy Bird, and yet he could not get up

life enough to speak to him, and somehow it did not seem at all strange that he was there.

All he could think of was:

"This is really Billy and the other one wasn't."

But at the same time this thought was passing through his mind he could not have told where he had seen the other boy or what it was all about.

As for Billy himself, he just stared at Ray and did not seem to recognize him at all.

"Dress yourselves!" ordered Sloky. "Dress yourselves and come in to breakfast—do you hear?"

Nobody answered, but in a mechanical way all the boys began dressing.

Ray did the same as the rest. Some mysterious power seemed to impel him to obey this man.

He never questioned but what he had to. All memory of past events was very dim and seemed to be fading away altogether.

After he got his clothes on, Sloky having left the room, he turned to Billy and said:

"Say, don't you know me?"

"No," replied Billy, shaking his head, "I don't."

"Ray! I'm Ray!"

Billy stared stupidly.

"I don't know you," he said. "Don't ask me to know you. It makes my head ache. I don't want to think."

It made Ray's head ache to think, too. Where had he seen Billy? To save his life he could not remember then.

In fact, he could not remember much about himself; even the recollection of the school had faded away from him, but whatever Sloky said was firmly impressed upon his mind. He was hungry and he was going to have breakfast—he could remember that.

Pretty soon he got it.

Sloky returned, and, in a stern voice commanding the boys to follow him, led the way into a larger room, where there was a table set.

The boys took their places mechanically and sat staring at their plates.

Breakfast was brought in by Sloky and placed before each one in turn.

It was a good one, too. There was beefsteak, and eggs, and coffee, and good bread and butter.

Ray noticed that the boys all made a dive for the coffee and drank down the whole cup, some of them at one gulp.

When he tried his own coffee he found it very bitter, queer-tasting stuff, but as soon as he had drink it his head began to whirl and it was just as though he had experienced an electric shock.

Every nerve in his body began to tingle. He felt elated. It seemed as though he wanted to sing and jump around.

All the boys now began to talk, rattling away at a great rate, but in a foreign language, of which Ray could not understand a word.

Ray talked, too, but without the faintest idea of what he was talking about.

He addressed his conversation to Billy Bird and jabbered away about boats and canoes and school matters.

Billy answered him in the foreign language if, indeed, it could be called answering, for it was certain that neither boy understood at all what the other was saying.

It was a queer state of affairs all around.

Suddenly Sloky appeared in the doorway.

"Get up!" he shouted.

Every boy sprang to his feet.

"Follow me!" was the next order.

It seemed to Ray that he just had to obey—that some dreadful calamity would happen to him if he didn't.

It must have seemed the same to all the rest of the boys. They followed Sloky out of the room like a flock of sheep.

CHAPTER XV.

CHASING THE SWAN.

When Ray passed through the door he found himself in what seemed to be a workshop.

He took in his surroundings in a dim sort of way and saw several queer-looking machines and great strips of metal, white like silver, and, in fact, it was pure silver, as he afterward knew.

On one side of the room was a big furnace and a melting-pot stood on the floor beside it.

Mr. Jacks, the giant, was bending over the pot, scraping the inside with an iron tool.

"How does it work with the new one, Sloky?" he called out, as the boys came trooping into the room.

"Same as with all the rest of them," was the reply. "The drug takes right hold."

"Ah, ha! Well, put him to work! he can't run a stamper, I suppose, but he can pack."

Pretty soon the machines were all in motion, being controlled by power from a revolving shaft overhead.

Each boy now took his place.

They took up the long strips of silver and inserted them between the jaws of the machines, pulled a lever and down they came.

From one dimes dropped down into a receiver below; from another it was quarters and from another half-dollars.

Billy Bird worked at a second machine, which turned out dimes also.

In a dim sort of way Ray understood that this was a counterfeit shop and that they were making bad money.

But he did not know enough to realize then that this false money was actually silver.

On account of the low price of that metal it was a very profitable business to manufacture small coin. The dies were well executed and the coins being of full weight, could be told from the genuine only by an expert.

For the next week Ray's work was to pack them in boxes and he became very skilful at it and was able to work very fast.

During all that time he remained in the same muddled condition, with only a glimmer of memory creeping in upon him once in awhile.

It was the drugged coffee that did it.

Three times a day it was served to the boys and they gulped it down eagerly.

Ray grew to like it and to like the sensation that followed the dose.

One day he got an extra cup and fell asleep. When he came to he was on board the Swan, with Sloky and another boy.

They went to the deserted village and Ray had to help unload the heavy boxes and to load a great number of empty ones.

After this was done the Swan sailed away again and Ray sat down on the pile of empty boxes and fell asleep and when he awoke his head was clearer than it had been for days.

It was the cool air of the lake that did it.

Ray awoke suddenly and stared off into the night.

Sloky was shouting to some boys in a boat which they were just passing.

It was Fred and Joe, of course.

Ray recognized Fred's voice when he called back the answer to Sloky.

He tried to get up. In a muddled way he thought of jumping overboard.

"Sit down!" shouted Sloky.

There was no help for it.

The same terrible influence was over him and he just had to obey.

So poor Ray dropped back upon the boxes and stared at the boys as the Swan flew past the Water Witch.

At the same moment Sloky tacked and Ray saw the boat no more.

"It was Ray! It was surely Ray!" declared Fred. "Oh, Joe, didn't you see him?"

"Yes, I saw him, of course," replied Joe, "and he saw me. Why didn't he holler? He looked so stupid. Just like that fellow he took out of the lake and who I say wasn't Billy Bird."

"That's the mystery," replied Fred, "but, look here, Joe Quigley, I know that Ray is on that boat and I propose to follow it till I see where they land him if it takes us to the end of the lake."

"You bet I'm with you, boy," said Joe, "and if there's any fighting to be done you'll find me right in it, and don't you make any mistake."

CHAPTER XVI.

TRACKED TO CRANE'S ISLAND.

Practically there is no limit to what two determined boys can do in such a case as Fred Fielding and Joe Quigley found themselves in now.

There was the Swan ahead of them, and they knew that Ray Whitcomb was on board.

"Do you suppose I am going to give up till I've got Ray here on the Water Witch with us?" exclaimed Fred, as he threw the sailboat off on the other tack. "Not much."

"Say, if we have to fight for it, you'll find me all right there, Freddy," answered Joe. "I may be clumsy and stupid and all the rest that you fellows say I am, but when it comes to fighting I'm right in it—you'll see."

"That's right," said Fred. "We'll get there, Joe. Say, we don't want to keep too near them, though."

"No; if they tumble to it that we are following them they'll give us the slip, sure."

"Let's stand off farther out into the lake. While it's light like this we can watch 'em. Once we catch on to their hang-out we are right in it, don't you see?"

It was shrewdly planned.

The boys then stood well out into the lake.

Fred had a first-rate fieldglass, which he had taken care to bring along from the boat-house.

The full moon made it almost as bright as day, and there really was little difficulty in following the movements of the boat.

Fortunately for their purpose this apparent indifference toward Sloky & Co. enabled them to follow, and they did not even watch the movements of the boat after a little.

After a run of about five miles up the lake the Swan turned shoreward and shot in behind a high, wooded bluff and disappeared.

"There!" cried Fred. "I suspected it! I knew I was right."

"Well, what is it?" asked Joe. "Let a fellow know what you are driving at. The Swan has vamoosed in behind that point all right. What do you know about things in there?"

"Crane's Island and the old powder mill," said Fred, briefly. "They are in there."

"Never heard of them."

"No. We fellers haven't been up there since you came to school, Joe; but the year before you joined us it used to be the regular thing to have our picnics on Crane's Island. It's something like the deserted village. There's an old abandoned powder mill there in the marsh. It is just about the most out-of-the-way spot you can imagine, and no large boat could possibly get in there on account of the sand bar across the mouth of the channel. Just the spot for crooked work."

"Then it's that spot we've got to tackle," said Joe. "Any chance to get the Water Witch over the bar?"

"Oh, yes; she'd go over easy enough; but it won't do, Joe. If we are going to do the rescue act, we can't sail right up to the island and let everybody know we are there."

"What do you propose, then?"

"Why, my idea is to make a cove I know on this side of the point and leave the boat there. We can cross over the bluff and swim the creek. Then we shall be on the island without anybody knowing it."

"Which is just what we want. Pitch in, Freddy. Get us to the cove as quick as possible. I'm spoiling for a fight."

"Shouldn't wonder a bit if you got one before we were through with it," replied Fred. "Here we go for the cove."

It was working up against the wind to make the cove now, and it took time, but the boys reached it without adventure.

It was a splendid place to hide the boat, for a thick growth of alders and young swamp willows extended right out into the water.

By the help of the oars and with a little dexterous handling the boys were able to run the boat in behind the outer line of willows, and when they tied up at last they were completely concealed from any craft which might happen to be passing on the lake.

"Well, here we are, Joe," said Fred, when they had made the boat fast and found themselves standing on the shore. "Are you ready for business now?"

"You bet I am! What's the next move, Freddy?"

"I think we had better cut ourselves a couple of clubs before we start over the hill."

"A blame good idea. Here's where we'll get 'em. I'd have you understand that it's myself knows how to use a shillaleh, too."

"Of course," laughed Fred. "Pitch in. Here's a good, straight stick for you. Get it down and I'll look up one for myself."

A little later the boys, each armed with a stout club, started over the hill, and when they reached the top there lay Crane's Island almost at their feet.

It was just one big swamp, separated from the bluff by a narrow strip of water.

There was another waterway leading right into the swamp, and at its end, almost concealed by the tall rushes, were several ruinous buildings, which Fred declared to be the old powder mill.

It was a much more out-of-the-way place than the deserted village, and as the boys continued their observation they saw the Swan away up in the swamp, close by the old mill.

"There you are," said Fred. "That's where we have got to go."

"I'm ready," said Joe. "Do we have to swim all the way

up there, or can we walk through the swamp, or how is it to be did?"

"There's a path through the swamp on the other side of the creek, or at least there used to be," replied Fred.

"Then we go for the path. Ready?"

"Yes."

"Come on, then. Here's for a race down the hill."

Joe started on the run and, being in advance of Fred, got down to the water's edge first.

Fred heard him give a suppressed shout and saw a dark figure go plunging into the bushes, closely pursued by Joe.

"Discovered!" he gasped. "Confound it, that's too bad! Joe has run against the guard!"

CHAPTER XVII.

BOLD WORK.

Fred did some lively sprinting down the hill.

When he reached the bottom and came out upon the shore he met Joe coming back, swinging his club angrily.

"Blame spy," he said. "I ran right into him. Wisht I could have got my hands onto him—that's all."

"I suppose he is on guard here, looking out for just such fellows as we are," replied Fred. "We're the spies, Joe."

"Never! Any man that calls Joe Quigley a spy will get this club over the top of his head. We are in the soup, though, Freddy. That's all there is to that."

"Don't know as we are. What sort of a looking fellow was he, Joe?"

"Oh, about the size of Billy Bird."

"Well, it wasn't the giant, anyhow. How did you come to lose him?"

"He lost himself in the bushes beyond there. But what's to be did? Don't say we have got to give it upon his account."

"No; we will go right ahead and take our chances," Fred replied. "But I think we had better wait a few minutes to see if that fellow shows himself again."

They put in ten minutes there on the shore waiting and watching in perfect silence.

"Now," said Fred at last, "ready!"

"All right, Freddy," whispered Joe. "What's the word?"

"Strip and swim the creek."

"Can't we wade across?"

"No; it is too deep. Tie your clothes up in a bundle and fasten them to the club. That will keep them dry."

The boys were soon ready for the plunge. With as little noise as possible they swam the creek and silently dressed themselves on the other side.

Of course they kept their eyes and ears wide open for the guard all the while, but saw nothing of him.

Fred began to hope that the fellow was only some tramp who had taken himself off in a hurry. Joe kept growling because he had not had the chance to give him one whack over the head with his club.

"Now for the old powder mill," said Fred. "Here's the path, Joe. It will take us right to it. I feel somehow that we are going to succeed."

The boys pushed on through the rushes, coming out at last in full sight of the buildings of the old powder mill.

There lay the Swan tied up to a little pier.

All was dark and silent about the ruinous buildings; it

was hard to believe that any one could be inside, but there was the boat to tell a different story.

Fred could not for an instant doubt that Ray was near.

But how to get at him was the question.

"Joe," he whispered, "don't speak a word. We'll first sneak up among the buildings and prowl around till we strike something. Now then, come on."

There were four of the buildings altogether, and the first that they came to was a long, low structure, one story high, into which Fred had been more than once.

As he drew near he saw at a glance that things had changed since his last visit.

The windows, which had been all open before were now boarded up and a new door had been set in what before had been a vacant space.

It was the same with the next building and the next. The fourth lay farther over, in the swamp, somewhat isolated from the rest, and as Fred now led the way toward it the moon went behind a cloud and a few drops of rain fell.

"Say, there don't seem to be any one here," whispered Joe. "That must have taken Ray farther into the swamp."

"Hush!" said Fred. "Don't you see the light?"

Sure enough a ray of light came stealing between the new boards which covered the nearest window.

Fred crept noiselessly up and, putting his eye to the knot-hole, peered in.

"What do you see?" whispered Joe.

"Dads. Half a dozen beds—some one sleeping in each. By gracious, there's Billy Bird!"

"No!" gasped Joe.

"You bet it is, and Ray, too. Oh, Joe, we have got on to them at last!"

"Let me look," said Joe, and the glance he took through the knot-hole confirmed what Fred had stated.

There were the missing ones calmly sleeping on the cot beds in the long room, and down at the end slept a large man, with a rifle leaning against a table near his cot, and a big club and a brace of revolvers on the table. All this the boys were able to see by the dim light of a small lamp, which also stood on the table with the other things.

Fred took hold of the boards and gently shook them.

It was just a shutter fastened in by a common lock. He took out his knife and ran it under the boards and pushed the lock aside and the shutter swung open.

"Good!" breathed Joe. "There they are, both of them; but can we get them out?"

Fred clapped his hand over Joe's mouth.

"Be quiet!" he breathed in his ear. "I'm going in there! Now, Joe, stand by me in case that fellow tries to shoot."

Without waiting for Joe's reply, Fred clutched the window-sill and flung his legs over into the room.

Two quick steps brought him alongside of Ray and he gently shook him, then harder, then harder still, until suddenly Ray sprang up and stared at him wildly.

"Fred!" he gasped.

"Hush! Get up! Follow me!" breathed Fred.

He seized Ray's clothes, which lay near a chair beside the cot, and with the other hand helped his chum to the floor.

"What is it, Fred?" asked Ray, dreamily. "What am I to do?"

"Come!" Fred pulled him toward the window.

They had almost reached it when a dismal voice called out:

"You, take me with you, fellows! Take me with you! I don't want to stay here!"

It was Billy Bird!

He was sitting up on his cot calling, and all in a minute the mischief was done.

"Hold on there! What in thunder!"

Bang! bang! bang!

Shouting with all the strength of a pretty powerful voice, Sloky sprang up from his cot, seized the rifle and blazed away at the boys.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"THE DOGS ARE DEAD, LOOK OUT FOR THE SWAN."

"Out with him, Fred! Out with him, quick! That's the talk! Take that, you coward! Ah, ha! Put that in your pipe and smoke it! Fire again at Joe Quigley if you dare!"

It was a tremendous relief to Joe to be able to speak once more.

As Sloky fired, Joe fired, too, and Joe's shellcase was better aimed than the counterfeit's bullet.

It took the man across the temple and must have stunned him, for he fell to the floor all in a heap.

"Heavens! you have killed him!" gasped Fred. "Ray, brace up! Do try and brace up! Help me out with him, Joe. There, that's the talk!"

Ray was a dead weight on their hands. He seemed to go right to sleep as he walked across the floor, but at the same time he appeared to have a dim idea that he was with Fred, too, for he put his arm around his old chum's neck and let his head drop down on Fred's shoulder, and when Joe took hold of him and dragged him toward the window he muttered:

"That you, Quigley? Say, look out for poor Billy Bird," and then, half naked as he was, he just sank down upon the ground and went off to sleep again.

The drug had a firm hold on Ray, for he had been given his dose just before he went to bed, but with Billy Bird, who had been in bed all the evening, it was different. Billy was as near clear-headed as he ever was now, and he caught up his clothes and staggered across the floor.

"Fred, and we've got both of them. Come on, Billy! Come on!" Joe shouted.

Billy staggered up against the open window without speaking and Joe pulled him out.

By this time Sloky had come to his senses and now sprang to his feet.

He seized a revolver and went out to look for the window, at the same time giving a loud cry, and as he passed one of a row of posts which supported the roof he pulled a cord and a bell clanged sharply somewhere in the distance.

It was over with trying to do the job on the quiet now, and Fred realized that he had all he could do to save himself and his chum from a fate that might prove worse than death.

He caught hold of Ray's arm and jerked him to his feet.

"Run! run! Drag him along!" gasped Billy Bird. "I can help with you. Don't let Ray fall down!"

Fred started for the swamp, calling to Joe to follow, but Joe had other business to attend to then, and he proved that what he had said about fighting was no idle boast.

It took downright courage to stand there facing the window as Sloky came rushing up, firing the revolver.

He could not see Joe, because it was dark outside, but Joe was there just the same, and all ready for him.

"Look! Jack!" yelled Sloky. "An escape! An escape!" He did not seem to exactly understand the matter yet. Springing out of the window taught him a lot more about it.

however, for he sprang right into Joe's arms, and then the fun began.

Joe had possession of the revolver in just one second. Then, instead of using it, he dropped it into the outside pocket of his coat and gave Slony the greatest old punnelling he had ever received. He landed both eyes and gave him one in the nose and another in the mouth, and a butt with his head in the pit of the stomach, and then a good lick in the back when Billy tried to run, which sent him tumbling down.

Then was Joe's time for sprinting. Fred and Billy Bird were running between the buildings, making for the Swan.

Ray seemed to have landed up a bit and to have found his legs, for he was running, too.

"We'll take the Swan!" Joe cried. "I've knocked that feller silly. If some one else don't turn up it's all plain sailing now. Here, Bird, you seem to be weak in your pegs. Give us your arm. I'll help! Sure you're the real Billy Bird this time!"

At the same instant the deep bay of a bloodhound was heard behind them, instantly followed by a similar yelp a little farther on.

"Dogs!" gasped Fred.

"They will tear us to pieces," muttered Billy, looking back.

"Yes, there they come!"

They had passed the last of the buildings now, and the Swan lay right ahead of them.

Looking back, Fred saw the gigantic Mr. Jacks standing near the doorway.

He was unloosing the collars on two huge bloodhounds.

"Sit down! Sit down, boys!" he shouted, and one bloodhound made a frantic rush toward the boys, to be followed by the other a moment later.

Then Mr. Jacks seized a rifle from within the open doorway and fired three shots in quick succession, yelling at the same time:

"Stop there, you Billy Bird! Stop, or you know what I'll do!"

"You can't do it!" roared Billy. "You've killed my brother, but you shan't kill me!"

"You bet he won't!" shouted Joe. "Into the boat with you, boys! I'll settle with these dogs."

The plucky fellow turned and faced the bloodhounds, which were right upon them now, and using Slony's revolver to better purpose than Mr. Jacks seemed to be using the rifle, shot them both dead in their tracks.

"Bully for you, Joe!" shouted Fred, while Mr. Jacks, with a roar of rage, fired again, but to no effect.

"Look out for yourselves, you boys!" he yelled, throwing aside the rifle. "You had better surrender! You can never escape from the swamp alive!"

"Hush!" barked Joe, holding Billy Bird into the Swan.

Fred and Ray were already in the boat, and as Joe jumped in, too, Fred cast off and ran up the sail.

Mr. Jacks stood watching them.

He put his hand out and must have touched an electric button in the side of the building, for at the same instant a bell clanged loudly over in the swamp.

"An alarm!" yelled Mr. Jacks. "The dogs are dead! Look out for the Swan!"

It was rather slow work, for the wind did not amount to much, and shut in as they were by the tall rushes, what little wind there was did not reach the sail.

Ray just sank down in the bottom of the boat and went to sleep, but Billy Bird sat in the stern seat blinking stupidly, and yet in spite of his appearance he was on the alert, and told Fred and Joe something of the truth.

"They are counterfeiters, that's what they are," he said, in answer to Joe's eager questions, adding:

"What's the matter with Ray? Why, Ray has been drugged with hasheesh, and so have I. I've been taking the blame stuff for weeks. It makes us so stupid, fellows, but it will wear off if you only give it time."

Fred listened, but did not go into any conversation with Billy then.

His whole attention was taken up in watching Mr. Jacks, who had come down to the edge of the creek and stood watching the boat. There were two or three men with him, and none of them made a move to do anything which seemed to Fred rather strange.

"Why don't they chase us, Billy?" he asked. "Haven't they got another boat?"

"Yes," replied Billy, "but it leaks. They are repairing it, and they have sent for a new one, too. They expect it up any day now, I heard Mr. Jacks say."

"Huh! if they wait for a new boat to come before they chase us, I guess we are safe enough," exclaimed Joe. "It was done pretty slick, wasn't it, Fred? I wish Ray would wake up. I want to talk to him and find out more about all this."

"Hold up! There's something wrong!" said Fred. "Billy, listen to me."

"I'm a-listening, Fred."

"Why did that Mr. Jacks of yours call out to look out for the boat? Who was he speaking to? What did he mean?"

"I don't know, Fred, but he meant mischief. He's a fiend—a perfect fiend!" replied Billy, who seemed to be growing brighter every instant.

"Bet you what you like it means some attack on the boat," said Fred. "Say, Joe, let's rouse Ray up and get out of this boat. We'll strike across the swamp to the mill and then get over to the Water Witch. What do you say?"

"Why, in ten minutes we will be out on the lake and can sail right around to the Water Witch," replied Joe. "We don't want to lose the Swan."

"I don't know why I want to do it, but I do," replied Fred, "and I want to do it right now. Billy, you know these fellows better than Joe or I can, know them. We don't want to take any chances with them, do we?"

"No, we don't, Fred," replied Billy. "I don't know exactly what you are driving at, but I say no, we don't."

"I'm going ashore right here," persisted Fred. "Let the Swan drift out into the lake. Perhaps we will have a chance to pick her up afterward, but I say let's get out of here as quick as ever we can."

Fred turned the boat in against the bank and sprang ashore.

Billy scrambled after him, and Joe, although he said nothing something to say about it being foolish, helped Fred to lift Ray out of the boat, following himself then, and allowing the Swan to drift down toward the mouth of the creek, which was only a short distance away.

It seemed almost like an inspiration on Fred's part.

Hear how it turned out, and see what a lucky thing it was that he made this move.

It was a more difficult matter than they had thought to arouse Ray, for he was in a deep sleep, and Fred was shaking him up and trying to get him to stand on his feet, when all at once there was a tremendous explosion down the creek, and

CHAPTER XIX.

HOW THE SWAN BLEW UP ON THE BAR.

Fred got the sail up on the Swan in a hurry.

In a few moments the boys were moving down the creek through the swamp.

Joe, who was watching the Swan, saw it fly into the air and fall back into the water a shattered wreck.

"By gracious, look at that!" he cried.

"It's the old man's work!" exclaimed Billy Bird. "He must have had a torpedo at the mouth of the creek, and one of the gang was down there laying for us!"

"See now!" cried Fred. "That's what he meant by hollering. 'Look out for the boat!'"

Just then the giant was heard calling again:

"Got 'em?" he yelled. "Got 'em, boys?"

"No! no!" came the answer from down at the mouth of the creek. "There was nobody in the boat!"

"Then they are in the swamp!" roared Jacks. "Sloky and I will start after them! You fellows strike in from the other end."

"We have got to hustle, boys!" said Fred. "Here, Joe, lay hold of Ray. We'll drag him along between us, if we can't move him any other way."

It was high time to make a move, for already they could hear at least two persons come rushing through the swamp from below, and a few moments later, allowing the giant and the man Slocovich just about time enough to get across the creek in the leaky boat, they could hear them pushing their way through the rushes at the other end.

By this time Ray had roused up a bit.

"Where are you taking me to, fellows?" he murmured, adding:

"Oh, I am so sleepy. Do let me lie down for a minute—just for a minute. I'll go with you then."

"No, no! Come on! Come on!" said Fred. "Brace up, Ray. Only for a few minutes. Billy, you are doing fine, keep close to us! We will give them the slip yet."

"Mighty lucky thing we got out of the boat," said Joe. "Fred, you were dead right about that. What made you guess it?"

"Can't tell you. Wasn't I right, though? Wouldn't we all have been dead ducks if we had tried to pass out of the creek in the Swan? I guess yes. Hello! Here they are close onto us! Joe, can we ever get over the hill? They will see us sure, and that means shoot."

"You bet it does," added Billy. "You want to keep out of sight of Jacks if you want to live. He's a desperate scoundrel! Oh, you don't know him as I do. If you did——"

"Hold up! Here we are at the hill!" broke in Fred. "Now, then, fellows, we'll strike in where those stunted cedars are, and crawl down as we run. I don't believe they will get on to us. It's pretty well clouded over. Once we can get among the cedars I believe we are safe."

They had not quite reached the place where the hill came down to the edge of the swamp, but they were pretty near to it, and under the circumstances it was altogether the best thing to strike up the slope then and there.

They had no more than passed the shelter of the cedars than Mr. Jack's voice was heard shouting:

"Look out for them there, you fellows! They've taken to the hill. Shoot 'em down, every mother's son of them! We shall have to move again if they escape!"

CHAPTER XX.

CHASED BY THE COUNTERFEITERS.

Unquestionably the four boys were in a very dangerous situation. If it had been daylight it is doubtful if they could have escaped, but as it was they were able to gain the top of the hill undiscovered, while the counterfeiters were still beating about among the cedars, trying to discover in which direction they had gone.

Jacks insisted upon it that they were still in the swamp; Slocovich declared that they had gone up the hill, and the boys could hear them arguing about it. As for the other two, they could be heard beating about, here, there and everywhere. In the confusion of it all the boys managed to get over the hill and down on the other side without being seen.

But here a most unpleasant discovery awaited them.

"Where's the Water Witch?" exclaimed Fred. "By gracious, I can't see her at all."

"Was she here?" asked Ray, showing some interest in what was going on now for the first time.

"Hooray!" cried Fred. "Bully for you, Ray! You're bracing up all right. Yes, the Water Witch was here and she ought to be here now. How about it, Joe?"

"We are below the place," replied Joe. "Away below it. Come on! We'll find her all right."

"If we don't I'm sure I don't know what in the world we shall do," said Billy Bird. "The old man will be sure to root us out, and he'll kill us, too."

They hurried along the shore, Fred trying to locate the place where they had left the sailboat.

"It was right near that tree that the cove was, I'm sure of it," he declared. "If we don't strike it there I don't know what in the world we are going to do."

They did not strike it there. When they reached the tree they found that the bend of the cove was right beyond it, just as Fred had said, but the boat was nowhere to be seen.

"She's gone adrift!" cried Fred. "See, here's where we tied her, Joe!"

"You are right," replied Joe, hollowly. "We are prisoners on the island, then, it seems."

"Boys, you might as well be dead," said Ray. "It's dreadful thing. When you know all you will understand."

"Here they come!" exclaimed Billy. "They are over the hill now. They are coming down to the shore. What in the world shall we do?"

"We must hide somewhere," said Ray. "How about those bushes up there on the side of the hill, Fred?"

"Might as well try it there as anywhere else," replied Fred. "I won't say we are dead sure to be discovered, but I'm afraid that's what it is."

They scrambled up the hill to the bushes, and all lay down flat on the ground.

Ray and Billy soon dropped off to sleep again. Fred and Joe did not disturb them. Breathlessly they waited, watching and listening, and soon saw the four men come into the cove.

Jacks had a dark lantern, and he flashed to about everywhere, grumbling at Slokovich all the while.

"It's your fault," he kept saying. "It's all your fault. I wish that fellow had broken your head for you."

In answer to this Sloky growled out:

"It's no more my fault than yours. What did you want to muss with these infernal schoolboys for, anyhow? What did you want to let Billy go, in the first place, for? If you hadn't done that all would have been well."

"Mind your own business. I promised the boy's father that he should have a year's schooling, didn't I? You know that."

"Rats! You have brought all this trouble upon us, that's what you have done," was the answer, and then the men moved on out of hearing, and, passing farther up the shore, did not return again.

Fred and Joe lay there for a long time waiting and watching, but there was not a sound to break the stillness. The counterfeiters had evidently been thrown entirely off the scent.

"What on earth are we going to do, Fred?" asked Joe, at last.

"Wait till morning where we are," replied Fred. "It's almost here. No use disturbing the boys now. If they can only sleep their sleep out I believe they will wake up all O. K."

This mean patience for another hour, but before the dawn came Billy Bird suddenly awoke.

"Where are we?" he asked, sitting up and staring around. "Still on the side of the hill? Have old man Jacks and Sloky gone?"

"Long ago," replied Fred. "How do you feel after your sleep, Billy?"

"I feel ever so much better," replied Billy. "My head is as near clear as it has been since the night I ran away out of No. 10."

"And what made you run away out of No. 10?" asked Fred. "Tell us now, Billy, for I think we have a right to know."

"You have—there is no doubt about that, Fred Fielding. You certainly have a right to know."

"That's what I say," replied Fred. "Come, now, Billy, out with it, old man. There mustn't be any more mystery. Was it you that Ray pulled out of the lake? Did you come back to school, or——"

"Stop!" cried Billy, in great excitement. "Ray never pulled me out of the lake. I haven't been back to school since the night I ran away."

"Then, by Jove, it must have been your twin brother!" exclaimed Joe.

Billy gave a great cry.

"It was my twin brother!" he almost shouted. "Oh, he's alive. Ben's alive!"

"Tell me all about it!" exclaimed Billy. "Tell me all about it, Fred Fielding. They told me that Ben jumped off the boat and was drowned."

"Perhaps they believed it. He certainly would have been drowned if it had not been for Ray, that's one thing sure."

Then he went on and told Billy all that had happened after his disappearance from school.

The unfortunate boy listened with close attention.

"That was my twin brother Ben, all right," he declared, "but I don't understand what has become of him. They lied to me. Of course, they knew he was there in the school; of course, it was he they were after, and Ray must have been taken by mistake. Poor Ray! No doubt he would have told me all about it if he had ever been clear in his head, but they kept us drugged all the time."

For some minutes Billy was silent. It took a little encouragement from Fred to make him take up his story again.

"Yes, I'll tell you all, boys," he said at last. "Now listen. You think perhaps that I'm an American. Well, I'm not. My parents were English, but I was born out in India in the city of Bombay. My father was an engraver and printer, and—well, I might as well cut all that short. He was a counterfeiter; the leader of a bad gang of crooks. That man Jacks was his friend and helper. He's a Frenchman; his real name is Jacques; there were more of them then, but—oh, well, father was caught and sent to prison, and Jacques took care of us boys and brought us to this country, and when father got out he joined us here. Boys, I come from bad stock, but I want you to understand that I have always tried to raise myself out of it—yes, I have."

"I believe you, Billy," said Fred. "You don't have to tell us all your business; cut it short. Just tell us why you went away that night."

"Oh, it's the wind-up of a long story," replied Billy. "Father is dead. The gang had been operating there at the deserted village for a long time. There was a secret room down under the old machine shop. We made bills sometimes, but when the price of silver got so low we made half and quarter dollars out of real silver—you couldn't tell the difference. They were sent all over the country—there's thousands of them in circulation now."

Billy paused again, the boys waiting with breathless interest for him to resume.

"I wanted to go to school," said Billy at last. "I wanted to get away. We were, all of us boys, kept drugged most of the time. It was Jacques' scheme. As long as father lived Ben and I were not allowed to touch the stuff, but when he died we also gradually got into the way of it. One day I asked Jacques to let me go to Dr. Whiteside's school for a year, and, to my surprise, he consented, with the understanding that I should come back whenever he sent me word. I tried to get leave for Ben to go, too, but Ben was too good a workman, so he wouldn't hear to that, and I went alone. That's all there is to it, boys. I was called back again, but I wouldn't go. Then I was called a second time in the letter Ray brought me. It was from Jacques. He threatened to kill Ben if I did not go, and so I went. It was like going back to the grave."

CHAPTER XXI.

MORE MYSTERY AT THE COVE.

"Your brother!" exclaimed Fred. "Well, Ray was right. He would never admit that it was you."

The last thing I ever dreamed of was that it would bring Ray into trouble."

"It wasn't your fault, Billy," Ray's voice said behind them. "I don't hold you responsible for it, old man."

Ray was awake at last and quite himself again. He was most curious to know all about the coming of Fred and Joe to the island, for he had only a dim recollection of what had occurred the night before.

There the boys lay, talking matters over, until daylight came.

The only other point of any interest which Billy touched upon was to explain that the gang of counterfeiters had moved from the deserted village to Crane's Island, thinking it a safer place for their operations, and not because the Secret Service detectives had discovered anything about their crooked work.

"They have never been caught, and I don't believe they have ever been suspected," he added; "and I want to say —"

"Hash!" whispered Fred. "There's some one moving about there on the beach!"

It was almost morning now. Daylight was close at hand, and as Fred pointed down to the beach, by the faint light of dawn the boys could see a solitary figure standing on the shore.

"Is it one of the gang, Billy?" whispered Ray. "He keeps his back turned toward us. I can't make him out at all."

"Nor I," replied Billy. "Looks like a boy, though, but that can't be—oh, fellows, it's my brother! It's Ben!"

It was with a wild shout that Billy said this, and he sprang to his feet and went bounding down the hill.

The boy instantly turned and gave a shout, too.

"Billy! Hey, Billy! Oh, come here!" he cried.

"Come on, fellows! We are in this!" exclaimed Fred, springing up. "First thing you know they will both be disappearing! We don't want to take any chances on that!"

Ray and Joe were close behind Fred as he ran down the hill toward the shore.

"Say, they've both disappeared already!" cried Joe.

"That's what they have, echoed Ray. "Where in thunder can they have gone?"

It was more than Fred could do to answer this question then, and it was just the same when they reached the shore.

Here where the Water Witch had so mysteriously vanished the twin brothers had vanished, too, for look in whichever direction they would the boys could see nothing of Master Ben nor of Billy Bird.

CHAPTER XXII.

NEW ANIMALS IN THE CAVE.

"It's a bait, that's what it is," declared Joe Quigley, after they had searched for Billy Bird until they saw no use in continuing the search any longer. "That's what it is, Fred, just a bait to lead us on."

"I don't believe it," replied Fred. "I have confidence in Billy Bird. I don't believe he is that kind of a fellow at all. What do you say about it, Ray?"

"I can't say anything, because I don't know anything," replied Ray. "You must remember, fellows, that I have been under the influence of that terrible stuff ever since they captured me. My head isn't clear yet. I can't think straight, but after what Billy Bird has told us I think if we can get off the island and back to school we ought to do it, whether we find him or not."

"Sure," said Joe. "There's no doubt about that."

"Oh, I agree with you all right there," declared Fred, "but the trouble is, we can't get off the island unless we can lay our hands on a boat."

"You will find that I am right," added Joe. "Billy has been captured. They mean to have us go prowling about looking for him, and then we will be nipped, too, that's the game."

"I don't believe it," repeated Fred. "Anyhow, if it's so, how can we help it? We have got to go prowling about, as you say, and the sooner we get down to it the sooner we'll know where we are at; anyhow, I believe in Billy Bird, and I believe that this is a case for a detective, too."

"Thank you, Fred. Thank you all, fellows, for your confidence in me," said Billy's voice right behind them.

Of course the boys faced to the right-about in a hurry, and there stood Billy just as though he had never disappeared.

"Where in the world have you been?" cried Ray.

"What did you give us such a scare for?" demanded Fred.

"Didn't mean to," replied Billy. "I couldn't leave my brother, and when I came back and heard you talking about me I thought——"

"You thought you would listen and hear what we thought of you," broke in Fred. "Well, I don't know as I blame you. Where is your brother, Billy? Was it he that Joe and I ran up against coming down the hill?"

"Yes, it was; he was afraid of you or he would have spoken then," replied Billy. "Here, Ben!" he called. "Come here and see the boys. Don't be afraid!"

Then out from behind a big rock that the boys had passed a dozen times in their search the very counterpart of Billy Bird stepped out into view.

"That's the fellow!" cried Joe.

"Hello!" said Ray. "Don't you remember me, Ben?"

"As though I could ever forget you!" said Ben. "You saved my life. You know now how I felt then, Ray Whitcomb. You know what it is to be half drunk with hasheesh. I am sorry you got into all this trouble on my account, but I want you to understand that I have been working for you ever since I ran away from the school."

"Hello!" said Fred. "Did you run away from school, too? We thought you were carried off the same as Ray."

"No," replied Ben. "All I can tell you is I woke up and found myself alone in that room with the window-pane cut out and Ray gone. I knew right away what had happened, and as I knew I couldn't do any good by hanging around, I just started right off to work for Ray and for Billy. That's what

I started to do when I jumped overboard. I knew Billy and I could never get away from the gang unless something was done. Although I was half stupid with the drug, the idea came over me all at once to do something desperate, and I did it, and, by thunder, boys, it's going to land the old man and his gang in State's prison, and I am glad!"

Gradually Ben had worked himself up into a state of excitement until he almost shouted these words.

Billy stood by looking at him admiringly.

"Oh, he's done it, fellows! He's done it!" he exclaimed. "Don't worry about the boat. It will be back in a little while now, and then you will see!"

"If it is just the same to you, Billy Bird, I'd like to know what all this means," said Fred. "It may be all right, as you say, but I wish the fellow who took our boat had left it alone, just the same."

"This way, boys," said Billy. "Ben was asleep when we came down on the shore or we would not have had to wait as we did. This way!"

Billy then led the way in behind the rocks, and there, to the surprise of the boys, for on one would ever have dreamed it, was the entrance to a cave leading in under the hill.

"By ginger! I never knew this place was here," said Fred. "Say, Ray, what fun we could have had on our picnics if we only had."

"That's right," said Billy. "And, boys, we'll have the fun yet. Wait till we drive out the gang and land them behind the bars where they belong and we will have a jolly picnic here with Carrie James and Olive Moore and Mamie Sheldon and all the rest of the girls."

"Does it lead through the hill?" asked Ray, as Ben hurried them on.

"That's what it does," replied Ben. "The opening at the other end is closed to where I ran into you two fellows. I didn't know who you were or you bet I would have spoken to you. Well, here we are!"

"Heavens! it's a regular arsenal!" cried Fred, looking around.

The cave here was quite spacious and opened directly on the creek, for the swamp on this side of the waterway did not extend up so far.

Leaning against the wall were a dozen rifles, and lying near them on the floor as many revolvers. Altogether, it was quite a military display.

"What does it all mean, Billy?" demanded Fred.

"Business," replied Billy. "You see——"

"Hush!" interrupted Ben, suddenly holding up his right hand.

Quick footsteps were heard behind them in the cave.

"Some one is coming!" cried Fred. "Is it all right, Billy?"

"There's half a dozen of them;" echoed Joe. "By jolly, if any one wants a fight, I'm their man!"

But Ben did not answer, and at the same moment two men came bounding in among the startled boys.

CHAPTER XXIII.

RAY PROPOSES A PLAN.

The two newcomers stopped short at the sight of the school-boys. It was evident enough that they had never thought of seeing so many persons in the cave.

"Who are these fellows? How did they come here?" one, a stout man with a smooth-shaven face, demanded of Ben, adding, at the same moment:

"This one must be your brother. He is the missing Billy Bird."

"I guess you have got the right side of it, Mr. O'Connor," spoke up Fred. "Don't you know me?"

The others saw then that these men were no strangers to Fred, as was indeed the case, for the large man was no less a personage than the noted detective, O'Connor, of Chicago, who had been in charge of Ray's case from the start, though Ray himself had never met the man.

"Hello! Is it you, Fred Fielding?" he exclaimed. "I didn't know you at first in the dim light. Some one has got ahead of me here, I guess! Come on there, you fellows! Come on! Part of our job has been taken out of our hands, all right, but there is a lot to do yet, and we want to get down to it right now."

Seven more men came hurrying into the cave then, pretty well filling up the place.

Of course, the boys were thrown into a high state of excitement, but before there was time to say much about it Detective O'Connor turned to Fred, saying:

"Well, I suppose one of these fellows is Ray Whitcomb?"

"That's me," replied Ray.

"Yes, and a deuce of a scare you have given us all," chuckled the detective. "I owe you one for this, young man. You have swindled me. I was working for the big reward that is up for any detective who could find you, and here are a parcel of schoolboys who have taken it away from me just as I thought I had it safe in my hands."

"You will get paid all right if my father has put up a reward for me," said Ray. "There's work enough to be done here yet, and don't you forget it. What about the boat, Fred? Perhaps these gentlemen can tell."

"I expect we can," replied the detective. "If the name of the boat is the Water Witch, I am the fellow that borrowed it. You see, I wanted to bring these gentlemen up to the island and the boat I was running was not big enough to hold them all, so I just hitched yours on behind. It's in the cove now, and all ready to take back the Jacks gang if we are lucky enough to nip them, and that's what we expect to do."

Of course, the boys had been worked up into a pretty good state of enthusiasm by the time all these explanations were made.

Matters were certainly closing in. All mystery had disappeared from the case now, and as Fred very truly remarked, when he and the detective wound up a long talk, during which

Fred told all that had happened since he and Joe Quigley landed on Crane's island, the whole thing had now boiled itself down into the question whether they could capture the queer coinmakers or not.

"What I am afraid of," said Mr. O'Connor, "is that they will take to the water on the other side of the island."

"And try to swim the channel over to the mainland!" exclaimed Ray. "They can never do it. Why, the distance is more than half a mile!"

"They have got a spare boat hidden in the swamp over there ready for just this sort of thing," replied the detective. "Isn't that so, Billy Bird?"

Billy nodded. He had said but little since the arrival of the detectives. Ben had explained to him how he met Mr. O'Connor on the night after Ray's capture, and being afraid of him, gave the man the slip and ran away, but how, later on, he had hunted him up and told him all he knew. It was entirely through Ben that the detective had learned about the gang being located on Crane's island, and that the present plan to invade the queer-money factory had been arranged.

"Well," continued O'Connor, "what we don't want to do is to let them escape by that boat, which some of them surely will if we all make a rush for the old powder mill, and to tell the truth, boys, I'm blast if I know just how to fix it so that we can be dead sure of bagging the whole bunch of them at one sweep."

"I can tell you," said Ray, quietly.

"How?" asked the detective. "If you know any way spit it out."

"Let Billy and me swim the creek and show ourselves in the swamp. That will draw the gang down this way, and if you can't arrange to scoop them all in, why——"

"Why, my name ought to be mud!" the detective broke in. "It's a great scheme, and if you will believe me, it was in my head all along, but I didn't like to propose it for fear——"

"For fear I should be afraid!" broke in Ray, in his turn. "Well, I'm not. I'll walk right into the workshop and give myself up if it will lead to the bringing of that scoundrel Jacks to justice—that's what I'm willing to do."

"I'm with you, Ray," said Fred, quietly, "but Billy Bird has suffered enough; he had better remain behind."

"Sure, and I'm with you, too!" cried Joe Quigley, dropping into his Irish accent, as he always did when excited. "Bad luck to that long-legged old villain, who's always swallowing his store teeth. I want to get wan crack at his head before I quit this business, and I'll knock them so far down his throat that he won't be able to cough them up again in a week."

"Scoundrel!" cried Detective O'Connor. "With such brave words as you fellows to help me the doom of the gang is sealed."

CHAPTER XXIV.

CONCLUSION.

Daylight had fairly dawned over Crane's island when Ray and Joe finally left the cave and prepared to swim the creek.

They were the last to vacate the place.

Billy Bird and his brother Ben were in the cove now on board the Water Witch, standing guard over Joe Quigley's famous craft.

As for Detective O'Connor and his men, where they were will perhaps develop later; at all events, nothing was to be seen of them when the three boys pulled off their clothes and swam the creek, making no effort to conceal their movements from any one who might be watching them over at the old powder mill.

"See anybody, Fred?" asked Ray, as they stood dressing themselves among the rushes upon the shore after the creek was crossed.

"Can't say I do," replied Fred. "They ought to be able to see us plain enough from the workshop, though."

"Which is the workshop, Ray?" Joe asked.

"That long building in the middle," was Ray's reply. "There's an awful lot of halves and quarters in the boxes there now, boys. The load they took down to the deserted village was only a very small part."

"I suppose some steamer is going to stop for them there?" asked Fred.

"Couldn't tell you," replied Ray. "My head was too muchuddled all the time to know much about it. I would listen to their talk, but I didn't take in what they were saying. Oh, it was a terrible experience. I wouldn't go through with it again for any money, and——"

"And you don't have to," broke in Fred. "That's all over. Come on, Ray. If they are going to shoot us let them try it on."

The boys now started boldly toward the low buildings of the old powder mill.

They had not gone far before Fred saw the door of the workshop suddenly come flying open and Mr. Jacks himself popped out his head.

"Sloky! Sloky!" he yelled. "By thunder, here's some of those boys coming back again!"

Immediately he pulled his long body through the door, and then all in an instant he came popping out again followed by the man Slocock, who had his head all tied up in bandages.

"It's the Whitecomb boy, but where is Billy Bird?" he shouted. Then putting his hand up against the house he touched an electric button and suddenly a bell rang out.

This had exactly the effect that Ray anticipated. There were only six of the counterfeiters, altogether, beside the boys, who worked in the shop.

The remaining four came running out to join Sloky and Mr. Jacks, and all hands hurried forward into the swamp, each man drawing a revolver as he came on.

"Hold on, Mr. Jacks!" called Ray. "There needn't be any shooting. You have blown up the boat and we can't get off the island. We don't want to starve to death, so we have come to give ourselves up."

"Oh, you have, have you?" sneered Mr. Jacks, making a

horrible face, and letting his false teeth drop down as he spoke. "Well, you are wise! Pity you weren't all blown to blazes, as I intended that you should be. Where's Billy Bird?"

"He's not with us," answered Fred.

"Can't I see that? Am I blind?" bawled Jacks, starting forward. "Capture them, boys! We'll run all three into the workshop and give them a dose and decide their fate later on."

"Will you?" cried Ray. "Your fate is decided now, Mr. Jacks. No. 10!"

This was the cue.

There were those crouching among the rushes on both sides of the advancing counterfeiters who knew perfectly well what it meant.

Before Jacks had time to gobble up his false teeth again a dozen men armed with rifles rose up out of the swamp.

"You're truly John Jacks! My name is O'Connor!" cried the detective, springing in front of the giant and planting a revolver at his head.

But quick as this was done, the detective was not quick enough to stop Joe Quigley from springing in front of him and dealing the giant one of his knockout blows under the chin.

"Oh—ah—oh!" yelled Mr. Jacks, and over he went backward, his false teeth flying out of his mouth altogether as his head flew upward, propelled in that direction by Joe's powerful fist.

At the same time Fred and Ray made a rush for Sloky and got him fast before that somewhat slow-moving individual could understand what had really happened, and as for the rest, they were in the hands of the detective's men in just no time at all.

Jacks and Sloky were handcuffed, and all were marched back to the counting shop, where the unfortunate, half-drunken boys were found hard at work, and were only too glad to give themselves up.

Meanwhile, Detective O'Connor had blown a pistol whistle three times in quick succession.

This was the signal agreed upon with the Bird boys, and in a few minutes the Water Witch with a smaller craft in tow was seen coming around the point.

Soon the boats came up to the bulkhead in front of the old powder mill, and the prisoners were run on board, followed by Dr. Whiteside's boys, Ben Bird, Detective O'Connor and six men.

The remainder of the detective's party stayed behind to guard the captured plant.

The Water Witch was run down to St. Joseph, and the prisoners taken to Chicago by train.

Their first stop was State's prison. As it was a Government arrest they were divided up.

Mr. Jacks went to Leavenworth, Sloky was sent to the Eastern Penitentiary of Pennsylvania, the others went to Sing Sing.

The unfortunate boys captured at the powder mill proved to be waifs without parents or friends.

They were kindly cared for by the Children's Aid Society of Chicago, and taught honest trades.

Great was the rejoicing when Ray and Billy Bird returned to Dr. Whiteside's school.

Fred and Joe were the heroes of the hour, and Ray's father paid Detective O'Connor \$1,000 as a reward for the activity he had shown in the search for his son.

Billy Bird took up his old place in the school, Dr. Whiteside putting him on the free list, and Mr. Whitcomb, at Ray's earnest solicitation, paid for two terms for Ben.

Billy was as bright as a button, and graduated the same year with Ray and Fred, and with high honors.

Joe Quigley remained behind to keep Ben company, and both managed to get through in fairly satisfactory shape.

But all these happenings occurred several years ago, and the boys who led at the academy at that time, are scattered now.

Ray is a lawyer in South Dakota.

Fred is in the lumber business up in Minnesota, and the Bird boys both work for him, Billy as a bookkeeper and Ben as a foreman in the saw mill.

Joe Quigley has succeeded to his father's contracting business in Chicago, and is very rich and prominent in politics. Mamie Sheldon is Joe's wife, and Fred married Olive Mason, but Ray remains a bachelor still, as does Billy Bird.

Last fall the boys all met at a little dinner in Chicago given by Ray to his old schoolmates.

Fred and Joe and the twins and others were present, and the affair was a great success.

As might have been expected, the stirring adventures of the past were lived over again at the festive board, and the principal topic of conversation was about the time that Billy Bird was missing from school.

Next week's issue will contain "THE BOSS OF THE CAMP; or, THE BOY WHO WAS NEVER AFRAID." By An Old Scout.

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SPECIAL NOTICE.—All back numbers of this weekly except the following are in print: 1 to 25, 27, 29 to 36, 38 to 40, 42, 43, 45 to 51, 53 to 55, 57 to 60, 62, 64 to 69, 71 to 73, 75, 79, 81, 84 to 86, 88, 89, 91 to 94, 98 to 100, 102, 105, 107, 109 to 111, 116, 119, 122, 124 to 126, 132, 139, 140, 143, 163, 166, 171, 179 to 181, 186, 192, 212, 213, 215, 216, 233, 239, 247, 257, 265, 268, 272, 277, 294. If you cannot obtain the ones you want from any newsdealer, send the price in money or postage stamps by mail to FRANK TOWNEY, PUBLISHER, 24 UNION SQUARE, New York, and you will receive the copies you order by return mail.

A LUCIFER'S WORK.

By Col. Ralph Fenton.

Arthur Wellington, entering the service of Vine & Drew at fifteen as cash-boy, by his industry and evident ability rapidly secured the confidence and esteem of his employers, and, when twenty-three, was made a member of the concern, whose name was then changed to Vine, Drew & Co.

Though by far younger than either of the other two, he was really the most active and enterprising member of the firm, giving it a reputation for solidity such as it never had enjoyed until he had a personal interest in its affairs; and his partners, having explicit confidence in his ability and integrity, willingly intrusted the management of the business to him, which he conducted in a manner entirely satisfactory to them and to all who had dealings with them.

One morning he failed to make his appearance at the office at the usual hour—a thing that had not occurred previously since his connection with the concern, save when he was absent from the city on business or enjoying his brief annual vacation; and, knowing that he was in the city, his partners were naturally surprised—indeed, alarmed—by the singular circumstance, for which they could in no wise account.

"I fear he may be ill," said Mr. Vine, "and will go and learn definitely with regard to it; though it seems as if he would send us word in such a case, especially as we have to decide this morning with reference to the purchase of the L. and B. stock, a most important transaction, and which must be based upon his judgment almost entirely."

Going to Wellington's boarding-house, Mr. Vine made inquiries concerning him of the landlady.

"I called him to breakfast," she replied, "and as he did not come to the table, I called him a second time—which I have never had to do before in the six years that he has been with me. I am afraid he is unwell, but hesitated to force an entrance to his room, and the door is locked."

"Are you sure that he has not gone out without your knowledge?"

"I hardly think he could do it. Besides, when he goes out, he always leaves the room occupied by him open, that the servant may have easy access to it."

"Please conduct me to his room," returned Mr. Vine.

It was done, and, as repeated and heavy knocks upon the door failed to elicit any response from within the room, Mr. Vine placed his shoulder against the door and gave it a push that broke the lock.

Entering the apartment, he saw Wellington lying on the floor—cold in death, as he found when he went to him. Beside him was a slip of paper, on which Mr. Vine, picking it up, found written:

"I am an embezzler of the funds of Vine, Drew & Co. to the amount of nearly ten thousand dollars, lost in wild speculations, which I am confident I can never return. This fact will explain all."

It was in the handwriting of Wellington, though it had no signature, and left no doubt in the mind of its reader that a suicide had been committed.

Mr. Vine gave such information to the proper officials as was necessary to a post-mortem examination, and then returned to his office with the sad intelligence of Wellington's death—doubly sad by reason of its cause.

"I won't believe that he was guilty of embezzlement, his own words to the contrary notwithstanding," exclaimed Mr. Drew, his voice so tremulous that his words were hardly audible, while tears stood in his eyes.

"I cannot understand why he should charge himself with a crime of which he was innocent," replied Mr. Vine, whose feelings were less sensitive than his partner's. "An examination of the books that were wholly in his charge will reveal the truth of the matter."

"Last evening," said the confidential clerk of the firm, Charles French—a young man of about Wellington's age—"Mr. Wellington wished me to call upon him at his room, and I did so. He had no special matter to discuss—as I had supposed he would have—and his talk was rambling. He was painfully nervous, and hoping to partially quiet his unaccountable mental disturbance, I proposed a game of drafts—a game of which he was very fond. He procured a board, but after we had each made a few moves he remarked:

"'I don't feel like playing this evening.'

"Then he spoke of various stocks, and said:

"'Speculation is the road to destruction.'

"I left him a little before ten, and his last words to me were:

"'Always stick to a legitimate business. Good-by!'

"It all seemed very strange to me—his manner, his general conversation, his parting words; but now they are comprehensible."

"You think he was a defaulter?" inquired Mr. Drew.

"With Mr. Vine, I cannot understand why he should confess to such a crime unless he is guilty. And as he said: 'An examination of the books will reveal the truth of the matter.'"

The books were placed in the hands of an expert, who, after long and patient examination, found a shortage in the accounts of Vine, Drew & Co. amounting to above ten thousand dollars.

And an autopsy disclosed a large quantity of prussic acid in Wellington's interior—"enough to kill twenty men."

There was no doubt that Wellington had been an embezzler, and taken his own life to escape the consequent disgrace. The affair was heralded by the papers throughout the country, made the subject of innumerable editorials of an admonitory character, and filed away in the mind of man with other similar events—soon to be forgotten.

By the recreancy of its junior member the solvency of the firm, which at once resumed its original name—"Vine & Drew"—was in no wise affected; and frequently Mr. Drew observed:

"To think that Wellington committed suicide for so comparatively small a sum! I loved him as I should love a son, had Providence given me one, and would by far rather have made up the deficiency out of my own pocket."

* * * * *

Charles French sat in his room, his feet on a table, a cigar between his lips, idly staring at vacancy. His reveries—whatever they might be—were disturbed by the entrance.

unannounced, of a man somewhat past the middle age, who said:

"Permit me to introduce myself—John Blank. I am glad to find you alone, as I have business of the utmost importance with you, which I prefer to transact without an audience."

"Please be seated," returned French, rising and extending a chair to his unexpected visitor.

"Thank you," replied Mr. Blank, as he sat down. "I understand that you deal largely in stocks——"

"I—deal—largely in stocks?" repeated French.

"Not in your own name," observed Mr. French, with a smile. "In such operations it is often desirable to conceal one's identity. I also understand that you have lost large sums in your ventures," he continued.

French grew pale, and for a moment was unable to speak. Then, his voice quivering, he asked:

"To what end is all this talk?"

"And that, hoping to retrieve your losses, you have resorted to unworthy means, even to crime."

French reeled in his chair like a drunken man, and reached out with both hands clutching at an invisible something.

"Mr. Drew," Mr. Blank went on, "has never believed that Arthur Wellington was an embezzler or a self-murderer, though there was every reason to believe him both. Saying nothing about it to any one else, he employed me—a detective—to investigate the case. I will finally state to you the result of my investigations:

"The note found beside Wellington's dead body would, save on a very careful examination, appear to have been in his handwriting. Subjected to critical tests, it shows various peculiarities never met with in writing that is inseparable from your own, particularly noticeable in the formation of the 'e's.' You are an expert penman, and can so successfully imitate any one's handwriting as to deceive him whose writing you counterfeit.

"If Wellington committed suicide, what became of the vessel in which he kept the fatal poison? None such could be found in his room; and the poison used is so instantaneous in its action as to afford no one chance to dispose of the vessel containing it, after having swallowed any of it.

"No certificates of stock have been discoverable among his papers, nor can anything be found to indicate him a dealer in such commodities. No broker in this city has ever sold him a 'privilege,' whether a 'put' or a 'call.'

"By various devices, I have learned that you, as 'Walter Evans'—(hearing the name French shook like a leaf)—"have lost immense sums in speculation, that you have continued to pay your 'margins.' How? Having no resources except your salary, you could only do it by under-hand means.

"You have had absolute control of the books of the firm for which you have worked, much ostensibly subordinate to Mr. Wellington, who reposed the utmost confidence in you; you have had free access to their vault. You stole your firm's funds, and 'doctored' the books to suit yourself, knowing you could charge all irregularities to Mr. Wellington.

"When your stealings amounted to such a sum that you

reasonably feared they would be discovered, you resolved to get rid of Mr. Wellington—and did. How?

"Among your intimate friends is one Dr. Thomas. Visiting his office—whose doors are always unlocked—in his absence, you helped yourself to a portion of his prussic acid, securing access to the case in which he keeps his poisons by means of a false key—I learned from him that you had a key that fitted the lock on the case; also that the quantity of his prussic acid had diminished in some inexplicable way.

"In Mr. Wellington's interior the autopsy revealed portions of peaches undigested, proving that they must have been eaten but a short time prior to his death. You are known to have a remarkable liking for this fruit, to keep it near you constantly in its season. When you called upon Mr. Wellington, the evening of his death—whether or not at his solicitation, as you declared, I am unable to say—you took with you some peaches heavily dosed with prussic acid, and gave them to him, knowing that he would not detect the presence of the poison by any peculiar smell or taste. That is all."

For a few moments French remained silent, then:

"It is as you surmise," he said in a firm tone. "I murdered Wellington in the manner and for the reason that you have indicated."

Charles French was tried, found guilty of murder in the first degree, and sentenced to be hanged. He died from brain-fever before the sentence could be carried out.

Recent statistics show that the total wealth of the United States is estimated as seventeen times that of Japan, \$130,000,000,000 to \$7,500,000,000. The total wealth of Great Britain and Ireland is sixty per cent. of that of the United States, viz., \$80,000,000,000. Other nations follow on in this order: France, \$65,000,000,000; Germany, \$60,000,000,000; Russia, \$40,000,000,000; Austria-Hungary, \$25,000,000,000; Italy, \$20,000,000,000; Belgium, \$12,500,000,000; Japan, \$7,500,000,000; Spain, \$5,400,000,000; Netherlands, \$5,000,000,000; Portugal, \$2,500,000,000; Switzerland, \$2,400,000,000. The wealth of the United States exceeds by \$23,200,000,000 the total wealth of the eight nations named above having less than Great Britain, France and Germany. The per capita wealth is as follows: Great Britain, \$1,777; France, \$1,666; United States, \$1,429; Belgium, \$1,285; Germany, \$939; Netherlands, \$833; Switzerland, \$815; Italy, \$633; Austria-Hungary, \$500; Portugal, \$462; Spain, \$270; Russia, \$250. The United States has sixty-nine times as much land under cultivation as Japan, 873,700,000 acres to 17,700,000. Commenting on these statistics the Oriental Review says: "The Japanese must go abroad or ultimately starve to death. The Japanese must expand. America, Australia and other countries object to the immigration of Japanese laborers, but not to the coming of Japanese merchants and money-lenders. These people might become powerful in the East. The Japanese have been a conquering people from the beginning of their history, and it would seem that their best chance of success today must be in this direction. They would have succeeded as conquerors had they not been except for the prohibition by the feudal government to build large vessels.



GIANT SAW PUZZLE.

This puzzle contains twenty-one pieces of wood nicely finished; take them apart and put them together same as illustrated. Everybody would like to try it, as it is very fascinating. Price, by mail, postpaid, 25c. each.

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A magic little box in three parts that is very mystifying to those not in the trick. A coin placed on a piece of paper disappears by dropping a nickel ring around it from the magic box. Made of hard wood two inches in diameter. Price, 12c.

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ITCH POWDER.



Gee whiz! What fun you can have with this stuff. Moisten the tip of your finger, tap it on the contents of the box, and a little bit will stick. Then shake hands with your friend, or drop a speck down his back. In a minute he will feel as if he had the seven years' itch. It

will make him scratch, roar, squirm and make faces. But it is perfectly harmless, as it is made from the seeds of wild roses. The horrible itch stops in a few minutes, or can be checked immediately by rubbing the spot with a wet cloth. While it is working, you will be apt to laugh your suspender buttons off. The best joke of all. Price 10 cents a box, by mail, postpaid.

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The greatest fun-maker of them all. A small amount of this powder, when blown in a room, will cause everyone to sneeze without anyone knowing where it

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BRIEF, BUT POINTED.

While excavating the ruins of St. Piran's Oratory, Cornwall, many skeletons have been dug up, several of them of human beings seven feet in height.

Arizona has a population of 250,000, of which fully three-fourths are American born. The Indians number about 25,000, the Navajos leading with 15,000.

A seagull was seen struggling in the air near the River Thaw. When it fell to the ground an oyster was closed on the bill of the bird. The seagull was suffocated.

A record herring catch for this season is 110,000, landed at Scarborough by the Golden Hope, Scotch herring fleet. The fishermen received forty cents a thousand for the herrings, and took in about \$450 for the night's fishing.

The Russians are manufacturing a fabric from the fiber of a filamentous stone from the Siberian mines which is said to be of so durable a nature that it is practically indestructible. The material is soft to the touch and pliable in the extreme, and when soiled has only to be placed in a fire to be made absolutely clean.

Thirty years ago the telephone list of New York City was printed on a small card, and contained the names of 252 subscribers. The latest city directory has 630 pages, and, instead of the small card, is a book about a foot square and weighing two and a half pounds. The city edition alone, piled one book on another, would make a tower more than six miles high.

The bridegroom in Mexico finds marriage a very costly business. He is expected to buy the trousseau, and he is fortunate if he can satisfy the extravagance sanctioned by custom and prompted by ardent passion. Young men from the country are said to be often seen in the City of Mexico purchasing all sorts of finery for the ladies of their choice, and the spectacle they present as they consult the measurements, which they carry with them for all sorts of garments, is very amusing.

The total output of crude petroleum in 1910 for the world was 327,472,256 barrels of 42 gallons each, against 298,326,073 barrels in 1909. Of this amount the United States alone produced 209,556,048 barrels, passing the 200,000,000 mark for the first time. In 1900 its production was 183,170,874 barrels.

Seven or eight years ago a plant was established near Lyons, France, for the manufacture of paving glass. Numerous descriptions of the new paving material were published and a brilliant future was predicted for it. The city authorities of Lyons permitted the manufacturer to lay a specimen section of glass pavement in the Place de la République, a center for heavy traffic. The glass bricks failed to stand the test of wear. The edges of them were soon broken and splintered and many of the blocks split in two, so that within two years it became necessary to remove the widely heralded innovation and substitute stone or wood. The city officials are agreed that glass pavement can be used under favorable circumstances for sidewalks, but not for the middle of streets.

OUR COMIC COLUMN.

Mrs. Gadd—That new minister ain't much in visitin', is he? Mrs. Gabb—No, I guess maybe his wife is a purty good cook herself.

"Tommy, if you'll saw some wood I'll tell you what I'll do." "What's that, dad?" "I'll let you have the sawdust to play circus with."

Little Willie—I say, pa, what is an empty title? Pa—An empty title, my son, is your mother's way of referring to me as the head of the house when there are visitors present.

Oletimer—Is your married life one grand, sweet song? Newlywed—Well, since our baby's been born it's been like an opera, full of grand marches, with loud calls for the author every night.

"I tell you our horse doctor knows his business! I called him to see my nag yesterday, and he gave him a powder and said, 'If that don't help him nothing will!' And, sure enough, this morning the horse is dead!"

"Gracious! John," exclaimed Mrs. Slangey, "you surely haven't brought any one home to dinner!" "Sure!" replied Slangey. "Haven't you got any grub for them?" "Why, no. You told me this morning you'd bring home a couple of lobsters for dinner, and——" "Well, that's them in the parlor."

Lucien Young, of the navy, has a good many medals of various kinds, awarded him for his notable services. There was a dinner in San Francisco one night and Lucien attended in full-dress uniform, wearing his medals proudly displayed on his chest. He rose to speak. After the applause had died away a man sitting in the rear of the hall shouted: "Lucien, where are you checked for?"

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